

# "Accidental Intellectuals": LOST Fandom and Everyday Philosophy

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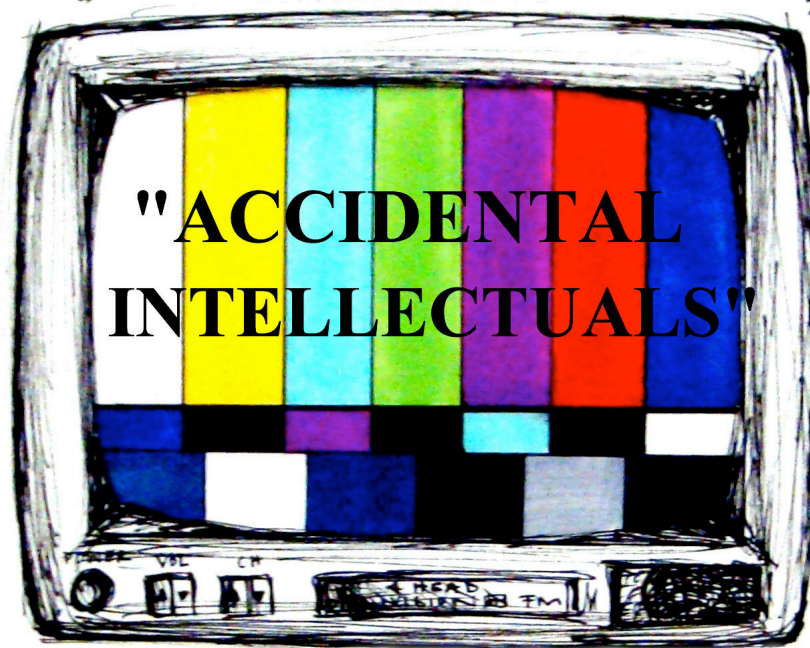
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# "ACCIDENTAL INTELLECTUALS"

*Lost Fandom and Everyday Philosophy*

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Scholar of the College Project

Advisor: Juliet Schor

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This thesis is dedicated to everyone who has ever been obsessed with a television show. Everyone who knows that adrenaline rush you get when you just *can't stop watching*. Here's to finding yourself laughing and crying along with the characters. But most importantly, here's to shows that give us a break from the day-to-day milieu and allow us to think about the profound, important questions of life. May many shows give us this opportunity as *Lost* has.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## ABSTRACT

As cult, quality, and mainstream television have merged, a new breed of show has evolved; such shows raise complicated themes and incorporate deep meanings. Drawing from Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) audience continuum, this study focuses on the more casual portion of fandom previously overlooked in fan studies. These "everyday fans" differ from their cultist and enthusiast counterparts by limiting television to a hobby, not engaging in creative production, and not seeking out fan networks. The interviews with sixteen everyday fans as well as four cultists/enthusiasts ground *Lost* fandom in previous fan traditions and also explore the experience of a previously overlooked segment of the audience. Using ABC's *Lost*, this study shows how mainstream, everyday fans often unconsciously think about practical and profound issues of everyday philosophy simply by following characters and storylines. In effect, viewers of the show become "accidental intellectuals." *Lost* raises issues of love, redemption, science versus faith and good versus evil. The interviews with everyday fans reflect that viewers were not only using critical thinking in puzzling out the show's mysteries but also engaging in deep analysis, personal identification, and the pondering of profound moral dilemmas through the medium of the characters, often without realizing it.

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## Preface: My Road To Fandom—or—How I Got ‘LOST,’ Personally and Academically

A NOTE TO THE READER: THIS STORY OF HOW I GOT INVOLVED WITH *LOST* IS WRITTEN PRIMARILY FROM MY STANCE AS A FAN, NOT AN ACADEMIC, AND SO IS CHARACTERIZED BY A MORE CASUAL USE OF LANGUAGE AND INFORMAL WAY OF SPEAKING.

I used to hate *Lost*. The polar bears, the hatch, the time-travel—all outlandish. At least I certainly thought so. In my high school, most people I knew fell into one of two camps (pardon the *Lost* pun)—the *Lost* fans, and the *Heroes* fans. I stubbornly and adamantly identified as one of the latter, distancing myself as much as possible from *that weird show about the magic island*. Hypocritical, perhaps, that I denounced a show so vehemently for fantastical elements when I myself was tuning in weekly to watch a man who could bend the space-time continuum and a girl who could spontaneously regenerate. Nonetheless, I continued to scoff at the updates my *Lost* friends would throw at me. Sometimes I wished the *Lost* fans and the *Heroes* fans could have a rumble in the lunchroom à la the Sharks and the Jets, though perhaps with less dancing.

When *Heroes* took a turn for the worse after the 2007-2008 Writers Guild of America strike, I was forced into silence as *Lost* continued successfully until its finale in 2010. Over four years after all of this began, I can’t help but look at myself and laugh. Not only have I now watched *Lost* in its entirety twice, but I talk about it at every opportunity, I’ve read countless fan books, and I even attended the *Lost* Academic Conference in New Orleans in October of 2011 (yes, there was one). And here in the crowning achievement of my college education, my senior thesis, *Lost* once more takes center stage.

Television and I have been close since childhood. I've had a TV in my room for as long as I can remember. The general consensus among people who know better seems to be that a TV in a child's room spells disaster. As much as I'd like to be a counterexample to this, I doubt many parents would be thrilled about having their child end up writing a thesis on *Lost* after four years of collegiate education and plan to study television for the rest of her life. So, thanks, Mom and Dad, not only for the TV in my room but also for not disowning me when I broke the news to you that I planned on studying one of the least respected aspects of modern society.

Junior year of high school was a huge turning point. One day in March of 2007, I found myself sitting at my desk around midnight, eager to do anything but my homework for the following school day. Intent on watching a few *Law and Order: SVU* reruns online before returning to my English essay, I ventured to NBC's website in the hopes of finding free episodes. Much to my disappointment, *SVU* was one of the few shows for which online episodes weren't available, and I'd have to get my Benson and Stabler fix some other time. Still unable to face the essay, I perused for other options, and saw that *Heroes* was available for viewing. Having seen some vaguely intriguing commercials for the show, I half-heartedly clicked the link for the pilot episode.

I stayed up until six in the morning that night watching episode after episode. Within a week, I had caught up with the current airing of the show and began to watch it live every Monday with a group of friends. I found myself online researching the characters, re-watching episodes and memorizing quotes, and even copying some of the artwork that appeared throughout the first season. I had become one of *those* people—one of those nuts who knew a little bit too much about show details and could recite favorite

lines a little too easily and too eagerly. It didn't bother me that others deemed my behavior as being obsessive; the only thing nagging at me was the fact that being a *Heroes* fan didn't garner me a catchy name like being a fan of *Star Trek* does for Trekkies. I began to lose interest as *Heroes* went on to suffer a truncated second season and absolutely aimless third and fourth seasons. Still, it remains one of my favorite shows.

Over the next few years I sped through a variety of series, ranging from *The West Wing* to *Prison Break* to *Sex and the City*. I knew nothing of self-control or common sense, and raced through show after show in perhaps unhealthily long binge-watching sessions. I enjoyed all the series I watched, but felt myself longing for more. I wanted a series that would make my heart go *boom-ba-doom-boom* like *Heroes* had years before.

[Enter *Lost*.]

Over Christmas break of my junior year of college, I found myself with inordinate amounts of free time. My solution? TV... *duh*. Sick of hearing countless friends berate me for not having seen *Lost*, I reluctantly rented the first disc of the first season from my local Blockbuster. As I finished the two-part pilot, I admit, I was intrigued. And then I watched "Walkabout," (Season 1, Episode 4). As John Locke wheels back from the desk of the man in charge of the walkabout trip in Australia, I couldn't help but hold my breath. As the screen changes to that unforgettable toe-wiggle scene from the first moments of the pilot, the music swells and viewers have that *aha!* moment that crashing on the island has somehow healed a paraplegic. In the span of less than sixty seconds, as



the montage unfolds and the music grows during one of the most goose-bump-inducing scenes I've ever viewed, I was completely and absolutely enraptured.

Two weeks later, I had finished the entire series.

(That's six seasons and a total of 121 45-minute episodes—just under one hundred hours of viewing. Through all my interviews and in all my conversations with *Lost* fans, I have only found one person who watched it faster—a fact that I am only allowed to be proud of when amongst *Lost* fans. Among the general populace, admitting to having done this garners me looks that border on nothing short of horror.)

I sat in stunned silence as the end credits of the final episode rolled across my screen. All I could think of was how badly I needed talk to someone about what I had just seen. For the next few months, I subjected almost every single one of my friends—not to mention strangers I met—to extensive discussions about the show. As soon as someone would say something even tangentially relevant to television or *Lost* itself, I would launch into a series of questions, comments, frustrations, and re-hashes that at times lasted for hours. Pretty soon, I became all too familiar with the sigh-and-eye-roll combo any *Lost* speak began to elicit from my friends.

As I realized that my *Lost* fever had taken on a quality that even surpassed my *Heroes* enthusiasm years earlier, I began to puzzle over the cause of this unique obsession. Why could I not stop talking about this show, let alone thinking about it? And what was it about *Lost* and *Heroes* that had drawn me in so fervently? As I began paying more attention to the conversations I had about the television shows I had watched, patterns emerged.

## **“Accidental Intellectuals”**

Beyond the surface level—the re-hashing of plot points and debates over the attractiveness of characters (I’d pick Jack any day)—my conversations with other TV viewers centered around the varied practical questions raised by the shows. As I talked about *Lost*, the questions were endless. Who deserved to be the leader on the island? Is Ben a good person? Can Sawyer ever really redeem himself from past mistakes and a lifetime of dishonesty and heartless manipulation? Is Kate capable of changing? Who’s right—Jack, the “Man of Science”, or Locke, the “Man of Faith”? Can Sun and Jin’s relationship survive such trial and deception?

These questions surpass shallow plot discussion and speak more to character development, the reality of character portrayal, and the relevance of happenings on the show to real life. After all, these questions only become truly interesting as they relate to our own lives. We care about Sun and Jin’s relationship because it speaks to relationships in our own lives. We care about Sawyer’s development because it has implications for our own dark histories and past mistakes. We invest in the Man of Science/ Man of Faith debate between Jack and Locke because many of us can feel this very debate in our own lives as we choose how to act and what to believe. These questions, these issues raised by *Lost* and other quality shows like it, are presenting us with an opportunity for engaging with a type of everyday philosophy.

Television shows in recent years have been less than subtle about raising these issues of everyday or ‘practical’ philosophy. The first moments of the pilot of *Heroes*

feature a voiceover as we watch a man standing on the roof of a building, looking over the edge:

Where does it come from, this quest, this need to solve life's mysteries, when the simplest of questions can never be answered? Why are we here? What is the soul? Why do we dream? Perhaps we'd be better off not looking at all—not delving, not yearning. [But] that's not human nature, not the human heart. That is not why we are here. (*Heroes* 1:1 “Pilot” or “Genesis”)

Every series, of course, raises different types of questions. *Heroes* obviously raises more of the “big,” existential questions. A show like *Sex and the City* raises practical questions about friendship, dating, and intimacy. *Lost* often raises questions of a more formal philosophical flavor, made blatant by the naming of such characters as John Locke, Danielle Rousseau, and Desmond Hume.

It wasn't that I went in search of shows that raised these questions for me—I simply found myself drawn in by good shows and, consequently, thinking about the various issues they raised. I doubt that many people consciously reason, “I want to think...so I'm going to watch some TV.”<sup>1</sup> I had never really thought of myself as an intellectual person, but these shows were, in effect, making me an *accidental intellectual*. Intrigued and distracted by complex plotlines and rich characters, I unconsciously and inevitably found myself engaging with both practical and profound questions. This thesis seeks to investigate whether or not all *Lost* fans become *accidental intellectuals* simply as a result of viewing the show.

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<sup>1</sup> I would be remiss not to note here that such people do exist, especially in the cult TV community. More on this will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

## Positionality: A Fan and a Scholar

As I took on the project of writing a thesis about a fandom of which I myself am a member, issues of my own positionality began to surface. My roles as fan and scholar were merging, and perhaps not as smoothly as I would have liked. Several fan studies scholars have indicated the problematic position of what Matt Hills (2002) calls the “scholar-fan”—namely, “the academic who also claims a fan identity” (2). Hills himself, as well as foremost fan scholar Henry Jenkins, self-identifies as a fan (Hills 2002; Jenkins 1992). The scholar-fan, however, bridges the gap between two groups with very different perspectives. Hill argues that while academics imagine fans as characterized by irrational passion and imprecise analysis, fans in turn see academic pursuit as “divorced from passion and commitment... [and fans have a] distaste for the specialist jargon of the academic” (7). He describes how Jenkins has been criticized as imposing his academic agenda and preconceived notions onto the fans he studies. By comparing the *Star Trek* fan activity he studies to a sort of university seminar, complete with textual analysis and creative production, Jenkins legitimizes fandom (and attempts to save it from the stigma it has suffered for decades) by claiming to unearth that fans are really just like academics. The problem with this, as Hills explains, is that “Jenkins’ rationalisation of the fan...[can be seen] as a product of the ‘academic intellectual’ value system” (11). Hills finally argues:

Any and all attempts at hybridizing and combining ‘fan’ and ‘academic’ identities/subjectivities must therefore remain sensitive to those institutional contexts which disqualify certain ways of speaking and certain ways of presenting the self. (Hills 2002: 20)

With this warning in mind and following in the footsteps of both Hills (2002) and Jenkins (1992), This preface makes it clear that I myself am a *Lost* fan as well as a scholar. Here I have provided my story as a fan, written as a fan. For the remainder of this thesis I use what would be thought of as more academic language. Regardless of the language used to make my points, however, the points themselves aim to respect both academic and fan subjectivities.

Truthfully, I cannot imagine having done this research without being the *Lost* fan that I am. While some sociological research, to be sure, is compromised by the insider status of the researcher, I found it an incredible asset. My conversations with fans were enriched because of my ability to understand detailed references they made; my own enthusiasm for the show often helped to draw out and encourage the enthusiasm shown by my interviewees. Ultimately, my own identity as a *Lost* fan proved vital to investigating and understanding the experiences of other fans.

## Chapter 1

### **“Don’t Tell Me What I Can’t Do!”: Research Questions and Methodology**

Does television make people think? Steve Jobs argued: “You watch television to turn your brain off and you work on your computer when you want to turn your brain on” (Snell 2004). Then again, Steve Jobs was trying to sell laptops, not television sets. Still, more than any other technology, television has a reputation as a mindless activity.

Recently, however, more and more shows are attracting attention for the complicated themes they raise and the deep meanings they incorporate. Love, friendship, death, fate, redemption—topics such as these are now commonplace in modern quality television shows. Even seemingly “light” or “fun” shows like *Sex and the City* discuss issues of fidelity, loneliness, and identity; the show may be framed as comedic and yet it has storylines about cancer, infertility, adoption, and adultery. Notoriously dark *Six Feet Under* makes a point of putting heavy issues like death and loss on the table for viewers in each and every episode. *The West Wing* and *The Wire* raise political and sociological issues for viewers to confront. This recent boom in outstanding series like these and others like them—*The Sopranos*, *Dexter*, *Breaking Bad*, *Lost*, and *Ally McBeal*—all raise a broad variety of big issues and themes.

How are viewers engaging with these themes put forth by the shows they watch? Certainly the more enthusiastic fans are known for parsing television texts like pieces of literature. We know that *Trekkies* and *Buffy* fans argue for the deeper meanings buried in television texts. But what about those viewers for whom TV shows remain a simple side note to their everyday lives? How do these viewers engage with and experience the

themes and issues raised by shows? *Do* they engage with such things? Research suggests that viewers of television shows are forced to think simply by going through the process of watching. Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2004) surveyed nearly two hundred people before and after they watched ten episodes of HBO's *Six Feet Under*, which follows a family who runs a funeral home. They found that attitudes about death had significantly changed as a result of viewing the show—participants reported thinking about death (their own death, the death of their loved ones, and death in general) more often and levels of fear of death had changed as well. These participants were not fans who engaged in extensive discussions about the show, read philosophical blogs, or wrote fan literature. They were everyday viewers who had simply gone through the act of watching several episodes of the show. Schiappa et al concluded that the reason attitudes and thinking patterns had changed was because people “generally avoid thinking about death unless the subject and its various dimensions are made salient to them” (471). By putting such themes right before their eyes, shows like *Six Feet Under* are making viewers think just by watching.

Not all viewers, of course, are always aware of this phenomenon. In an essay discussing certain philosophical aspects of *Dexter*, Amper (2010) argues that “Viewers may not consciously puzzle out these ideas; even so, the dilemma is there to unsettle us” (105). It seems these shows are making people think without realizing it. *Modern quality shows are actually making audience members into accidental intellectuals.*

Focusing on fans of the show *Lost*, the current study aims to investigate whether or not viewers of the show are forced to think about themes and everyday issues presented in the show simply by virtue of watching. *Lost* particularly presents two types

of philosophy to its audience: academic philosophy and everyday philosophy. Fans and critics alike have linked the show with the academic philosophy. It's hard not to—with character names like “John Locke” and “Danielle Rousseau,” and episode titles like “Man of Science, Man of Faith.” Barbaum (2011) asks: “It's enough to make you wonder: If you weren't a *Lost* fan, would you have found philosophy so much fun?” (72). The show also, however, presents viewers with issues of practical, everyday philosophy: how should we treat others? Can we overcome emotional baggage? Are we controlled by fate? What do we owe to other people? Does our past control us? This study aims to investigate the experience of *Lost* fans and, more specifically, whether or not they engage with either of these two types of philosophy, consciously or unconsciously, as a result of watching the show.

Using Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) audience continuum discussed further in the next chapter, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature and investigate the experiences of a range of types of fans. Previous literature has focused on the incredibly devoted, active fans—those whom Abercrombie and Longhurst call “cultists” and “enthusiasts.” Those whom they call “fans” are more everyday, casual fans for whom the show becomes nothing more than a pleasant diversion. For the cultists and enthusiasts, the show becomes a part of daily life and consumes large amounts of time. In order to gain perspective on the spectrum of fans *Lost* has created, both everyday fans and cultists/enthusiasts were targeted for the present study. This not only grounds this study in precedent by interviewing the cultists/enthusiasts that have previously received attention in the literature, but also allows for innovation by focusing on the everyday fans that have previously been overlooked.



## Methodology

The preface preceding this chapter details how I as an individual became involved with *Lost* as a viewer and fan. In order to prepare myself for investigating the experiences of other fans, I immersed myself in the show and its fanbase. First, I carefully re-watched all six seasons of the series—121 episodes, just under 100 viewing hours in total. This re-watch allowed me to have the detailed and nuanced understanding of characters, plotlines, and scenes that became incredibly important not only in reading books and blogs by fans but also for talking knowledgably to any fan I encountered. I also investigated the fan activity on the Internet for which *Lost* became so notorious. I navigated through blogs, including three of the most popular among fans: “DarkUFO” ([darkufo.blogspot.com](http://darkufo.blogspot.com)), “Get LOST with JOpinionated,” ([jopinionated.blogspot.com](http://jopinionated.blogspot.com)), and “Nik at Nite” ([nikkistafford.blogspot.com](http://nikkistafford.blogspot.com)). I also explored fan forums, including The Fuselage ([www.thefuselage.com](http://www.thefuselage.com)), famous for how it allowed fans to directly communicate with the writers and members of the cast. I read and browsed pages on the *Lost* fan wiki page, [Lostpedia.com](http://Lostpedia.com). These fan sites are all further discussed in Chapter 4.

Beyond the Internet, I explored *Lost* fandom by readings books by and about *Lost* fans. The first of Nikki Stafford’s series *Finding LOST* provided a detailed episode guide, complete with analysis, for the first two seasons of the show. Stafford is also the author of “Nik at Night,” the blog mentioned above. Reading Jon Lachonis and Amy Johnston’s *LOST Ate My Life* provided the story of the most involved fans; the book also discusses the fan forum The Fuselage and aspects of the inception and creation of the show itself. Marc Oromaner’s book *The Myth of Lost* helped to provide an idea of the depth of meaning many fans were taking from the show. Chris Seay’s *The Gospel According to*

*Lost* served as an example of the extent to which certain fans engaged with the religious references and themes of the show. David Lavery and Lynette Porter's *Unlocking the Meaning of Lost* gave further analysis on the show through the second season. The *Ultimate LOST and Philosophy* and *Reading LOST* included academic essays on philosophical issues raised in the show and various aspects of content and production, respectively.

In order to meet and network with some of the most involved fans, I attended the *Lost* Academic Conference in New Orleans from October 6-8, 2011, put on as part of the annual conference of the Pop Culture Association of the South. I heard papers delivered on philosophical, literary, and religious ties to *Lost* as well as papers on fans and the Internet fan sites of the show. I met individuals well-known among fans for their blogs, books, and essays. The connections I made with individuals who attended the conference allowed me to gain a better understanding of what Lachonis and Johnston (2008) call the “upper echelon” (121) of *Lost* fandom. Four of these individuals later agreed to interviews and became the second sample for this study.

Two types of fans, described above, were targeted for interviews. The first sample consisted of “everyday fans” for whom *Lost* fandom constituted a hobby and nothing more—certainly not to the point of being all-consuming of free time and energy. In order to find such fans, I relied primarily on word of mouth amongst people I know. I also created a Facebook event calling for participants and encouraged my friends to invite other friends. Beyond the first round of interviewees gathered from my own friends and those who replied to the Facebook event, the remaining participants were gathered through snowball sampling as my respondents referred me to other candidates. In all,

sixteen such fans were interviewed: fifteen undergraduate students at Boston College and one undergraduate of Washington University in St. Louis with whom I was friends in high school. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 22—sophomores to seniors in college. In total, thirteen seniors, two juniors, and one sophomore were interviewed. The sample consisted of five women and eleven men.

Each interview followed a standard procedure. After signing an Institutional Review Board approved consent form, each participant was given five dollars to compensate for his or her time. Before beginning the conversation, students were shown a video to help refresh their memory of the show, the plot lines, and the characters. The video—“Thank You L O S T (Season 1-6)”<sup>1</sup>—is a Youtube summary video of *Lost*’s six seasons. The interviews were semi-structured and aimed to establish an understanding of each fan’s general television habits, involvement with the show, and opinion on various elements, including, for example, the religious and philosophical references. Interviews ranged from twenty minutes to an hour and twenty minutes.

The second group of respondents were cultists and enthusiasts by Abercrombie and Longhurst’s (1998) definition—those for whom involvement in the show became more than a hobby and who were involved in fan activities, which ranged from authoring blogs and books to online participation and attendance of fan gatherings. Four such fans were interviewed. All four are individuals I met at the *Lost* Academic Conference in New Orleans. Pearson Moore is the author of numerous popular books and essays on *Lost* (and more recently on *Game of Thrones*), including *Lost Humanity: The Mythology and*

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<sup>1</sup> For the URL and other information about the date and source of this video, see the Bibliography.

*Themes of LOST*. He has also authored several historical novels, including *Cartier's Ring*. His books are consistently the top-selling works in their category on sites such as Amazon.com. Jennifer Galicinski is a graduate student at Regent College in Vancouver working towards a Master of Interdisciplinary Studies. She has written pieces on the philosophical and theological aspects of *Lost*. Jo Garfein is the author of her extremely popular fan blog "Get LOST with JOpinionated." As a result of the success and respect her blog garnered, Garfein transitioned into a freelance entertainment writer covering television for a variety of sites. Moore, Garfein, and Galicinski all contributed essays to the recently released book *LOST Thought*, edited by Moore. Chris J Doran works as Director of Marketing for a consumer electronics company and was an active participant in the infamous "Nik at Nite" blog by Nikki Stafford, author of the *Finding LOST* series. Interviews with these individuals were conducted remotely using the telephone and Skype, due to distance issues. These interviews focused more on the specifically individual stories of the interviewees and followed a relatively loosely structured format.

Due to the limited size and demographic composition of the sample of everyday fans, results are not statistically representative for all such fans. The sample is, however, sufficient for providing a better understanding of this level of fandom and for providing some of the first research evidence for this previously neglected segment of Abercrombie and Longhurst's continuum. It helps give an idea of what is happening at the mainstream level as television has evolved into its current form. The interviews with the second sample, the four cultists/enthusiasts, provide a personal perspective of the experiences of *Lost* fans at this level. These interviews also establish that the activities and experiences of *Lost* cultists/enthusiasts are generally in line with the previous research on fans of this

level. The two sets of interviews together provide an overview of fans across three segments of the audience continuum, providing a much broader understanding than previous studies that focused only on the cultists/enthusiasts. The effectiveness and limitations of this study are further discussed in Chapter 7.

### **Map of the Following Chapters**

Chapter 2 provides a literature review of fan studies, spanning from Henry Jenkins' foundational work with *Star Trek* fans in *Textual Poachers* in 1992 to the contemporary research centering around fan activity on the Internet. Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) work on the idea of taste and social distinction is also discussed. Chapter 3 situates *Lost* within its television context. The historical roots of "cult" and "quality" television are explored. The current merging of cult, quality, and mainstream TV is explained and *Lost* is proposed as a perfect example of this trend. Chapter 4 gives an introduction to the content and narrative structure of *Lost* and how both aspects have contributed to the creation of a unique audience. The ensemble cast and mysterious plotlines are discussed as part of the show's complex serial narrative structure. The fan activity on the Internet inspired by the show's complexity is outlined—from blogs and fan forums to alternate reality games and fan wiki pages. The chapter concludes by discussing *Lost* as an open text, lending itself to multiple interpretations. Chapters 5 and 6 give the results of the two sets of interviews. Chapter 5 explores the results of the sixteen interviews with undergraduate, everyday fans. Chapter 6 then explores the results of discussions with four *Lost* cultists/enthusiasts. Finally, Chapter 7 further discusses the results of this study and the implications for our understanding of fans and television viewers. The research questions posed above are

revisited. The limitations and successes of the current study are explored and directions for future research proposed.

## Chapter 2

### **“We Have to Go Back!”: The Past, Present, and Future of Fan Studies**

Fans care. When we think of fandom, the last thing we think of is apathy and passivity. We think of screaming girls (Ehrenreich et al 1992), DVD collector’s sets, and conventions. We think of people owning posters, sporting t-shirts, and talking in lingo from their favorite television show or favorite movie. Matt Hills (2002) says that, “everybody knows what a ‘fan’ is” (ix). Despite what is inherent in this declaration—namely, that the notion of fandom is somewhat intuitive and involves simple common sense (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998)—academic scholars have tried for the past two decades to formulate theories about the phenomenon. It is one thing to intuitively know what a “fan” is and be able to use this language in everyday life. It is quite another to be able to understand the phenomenon of fandom sociologically and psychologically. Hills himself recognizes the need to advance beyond pragmatic, everyday understandings: “Surely our common sense notions of fandom cannot be left untouched by the need for academic rigour and conceptual clarity?” (Hills 2002, ix). Since the 1990s, the subject has been far from ‘left untouched.’

Before studies specific to fandom emerged, however, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) examined the seemingly straightforward idea of taste. Tastes vary; we all like different (or similar) things—this seems simple enough. Taste, however, as Bourdieu describes, can be used as a tool to create social divide—*hierarchical* social divide. As Jenkins (1992) notes, “Taste becomes one of the important means by which social distinctions are maintained and class identities are forged” (16). Indeed Bourdieu describes the inherent creation of the ‘other’ in expressing tastes: “tastes are perhaps first and foremost

distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance...of the tastes of others” (Bourdieu 1984, 56). We define what we like against what others like; hand in hand with an assertion of our own taste is the rejection of any competing opinions. Bourdieu argues that the assertion of one’s tastes is in fact an attempt at legitimization of one’s life. People use tastes in their attempts to be socially acceptable and socially respectable. Indeed, within the seemingly innocuous idea of taste, Bourdieu saw a more nefarious device for social distinctions.

Cultural tastes, according to Bourdieu, map closely with economic status. He argues that, “It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely the one form recognized by economic theory” (Bourdieu 1986, 2). Breaking from the notion that the only capital individuals can have is monetary, Bourdieu argues that culture itself is like “an economy in which people invest and accumulate capital” (Fiske 1992, 30-1). Bourdieu proposes that there are three types of capital operating in the creation of social distinctions: economic, cultural, and social. These three types of capital interact and can in fact be converted. For example, cultural capital in the form of a respected education can be converted into economic capital, since this cultural capital is considered of worth and can earn one a well-paid position. In other words, the accumulation of cultural capital does not simply result in a lot of cultural capital, but instead can lead to economic capital as well. Certain forms of cultural capital are less respected and not as easily converted into economic capital. Fiske (1992) explains: “It is the exclusion of popular or fan cultural capital from the educational system that excludes it from the official and disconnects it from the economic” (45). The distinction, then, between a taste for



Shakespeare and a taste for *Star Trek*, in turn strengthens an economic division between the Shakespeare scholar and the Trekkie. The person with a taste for and knowledge of Shakespeare can accumulate economic capital by ‘cashing in,’ so to speak, on his or her cultural capital. Fewer opportunities are open to the fan with knowledge of *Star Trek*. Some fans are able to make money from blogging or writing books, such as two of the cultists/enthusiasts interviewed for this study. These cases are, however, the exception.

Bourdieu’s (1986) third type of capital—social—becomes relevant to the study of fans as well. Where cultural capital deals with the accumulation of knowledge, social capital deals with the accumulation of social ties: it is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1986, 10). The strong communal bonds between groups of fans, as investigated by Jenkins (1992), constitute social capital for members of such groups. The social capital enjoyed by members of a fan network, however, is less than that enjoyed by, say, members of a network of academics. Social capital depends not only on the extent of one’s network but also on the “volume of capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom [a person] is connected” (Bourdieu 1986, 10). Thus, while fans do accumulate both cultural and social capital through their engagements with a media text and their interactions with other fans, the capital they accumulate is in a way of lesser value due to the increased difficulty with which it can be converted into economic capital. Fiske (1992) states: “Cultural capital thus works hand in hand with economic capital to produce social privilege and distinction” (31). Those with inferior

tastes—fan tastes—remain, for the most part, socially and economically inferior to those with superior tastes for high culture objects like Shakespeare or opera.

It is from this inferior position that Henry Jenkins (1992) attempts to rescue fans in his foundation work *Textual Poachers*. He conducts “an ethnographic account of a particular group of media fans, its social institutions and cultural practices, and its troubled relationship to the mass media and consumer capitalism” (Jenkins 1992, 1). Focusing mainly on fans of the *Star Trek* franchise, but also offering discussion of fans of other programs such as *Beauty and the Beast*, Jenkins provides the first ‘inside story’ of fandom. Previously only stereotyped from the outside as “ ‘kooks’ obsessed with trivia, celebrities, and collectibles; as misfits and ‘crazies’”(11), Jenkins strips away the projections of mainstream society and argues that an in-depth look at fandom paints a very different picture. As viewed by most of society, fans have a hard time shaking the original “connotations of religious and political zealotry, false beliefs, orgiastic excess, possession, and madness” (12) associated with the term from which “fan” is derived: “fanatic.”

Scholars agree that historically, the primary association with fandom is indeed *deviance* (Jenkins 1992; Jenson 1992; Fiske 1992; Hills 2002). The intense enthusiasm that fans show for media objects is characterized as inappropriate: such rigor and rabid attention should only be reserved for *acceptable* objects, such as those that the academy has historically focused on. Jenkins (1992) asks:

Would these same practices (close attention, careful re-reading, intense discussion, even the decipherment of texts in foreign or archaic languages) be read as extreme if they were applied to Shakespeare instead of *Star Trek*, Italian

opera instead of Japanese animation, or Balzac instead of  
*Beauty and the Beast?* (P. 53)

Jenkins even notes that the three examples of “high brow” culture that he gives—Shakespeare, opera, and Balzac—were in fact originally enjoyed by the masses and have only recently been re-envisioned as belonging to the realm of the cultural elite. Jenson (1992) similarly likens the lyrical knowledge of a Barry Manilow fan to the textual knowledge of a Joyce scholar: “The mind may reel at the comparison, but why?” (19). It is Bourdieu’s explanation of the system of cultural capital and tastes that provides the answer. The practices between fans and scholars may not differ—in fact much of Jenkins’ (1992) argument centers on the fact that the activity of fans directly resembles the activity of scholars—but the objects of study do. It is this difference that relegates fans to a lower social status. Following Bourdieu’s ideas of the conversion of capital, this difference also relegates fans to a lower economic status. In the eyes of society, the mistake fans make is not their enthusiastic ‘poaching’ of texts (Jenkins 1992, drawing from de Certeau 1984) but instead the direction in which they focus their gaze.

It is worth noting that Jenkins’ defense of fandom, centering on fan activity, completely revolutionizes the previous characterization of all television audiences. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt School focused on the vapidness of audiences as they face media influence. They argued that the media industry mass produces programs of little to no quality for consumption and that audiences are fooled into thinking the programs have some sort of worth (Horkheimer & Adorno 1944). They point to the (at the time) recent innovation of sound film as typifying the problem with media objects:

They are so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are all undeniably needed to apprehend them at all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts. (Horkheimer & Adorno 1944, 387)

Their description is easily translated for our purposes to apply to television. The theme of a lack of thought on the part of audiences runs through much of their argument. They say that the entertainment industry is meant to foster mere pleasure—“the liberation which amusement promises is freedom from thought and from negotiation” and “pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1944, 389). For these two theorists, media audiences are primarily characterized by their passivity and ignorance.

Jenkins’ (1992) work establishes that passivity can hardly be used to characterize at least the fan segment of audiences.<sup>2</sup> He sees fans not as “cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers, [but instead] as active producers and manipulators of meanings” (Jenkins 1992, 23). The *Star Trek* fans he describes not only discuss and think about the program but also produce art, fan fiction, music, and videos based off of the show. He concludes by saying that, “Fandom does not prove that all audiences are active; it does, however, prove that not all audiences are passive” (Jenkins 1992, 287).

Fan scholars writing since Jenkins’ *Textual Poachers* have taken issue with various nuances of Jenkins’ theory or the assumptions from which he operates. Matt Hills (2002) gives a significant amount of attention to the positionality of scholars and researchers who also identify as fans. He examines the particular positions of the “fan-

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<sup>2</sup> There are, of course, audience segments outside of what academia has traditionally called “fans.” One such segment is the everyday fans investigated as the first sample in this study.

scholar” and “scholar-fan” who combine membership in the academy and in fandom. Both academia and fandom, Hills argues, have “imagined subjectivities...which are linked to cultural systems of value and community” (8). Each projects its own system of values on the other. This is why, Hills argues—following the lead of Michael (2000)—Jenkins is only able to redeem his *Star Trek* fans by comparing them to academics. Michael (2000) argues that, “as [Jenkins] describes the Trekkie ‘community,’ it begins to resemble a sort of idealized research seminar engaged in a fairly traditional form of literary study” (120). The scholar-fan, Hills reasons, must be aware of such in-born biases and work against projecting his or her own values on the subjects of study—namely, fans—who may not share such values.<sup>3</sup>

Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) re-envisioned the audience as being spread along a continuum. They rethink the fan/mainstream dichotomy and instead conceive of audiences as involving five types of viewers: consumers, fans, cultists, enthusiasts, and petty producers. This continuum is composed of groups that “differ significantly along the dimensions of object of focus, extent and nature of media use and degree and nature of organization” (138). Those people that most research refers to as “fans” actually fall more within the realm of “cultist” and “enthusiast” in Abercrombie and Longhurst’s conception. They define “fans” as “individuals who are not yet in contact with other people who share their attachments, or may only be in contact with them through...day-to-day contact with peers” (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 138). This hardly sounds like the well-connected community of *Star Trek* fans about which Jenkins (1992) speaks.

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<sup>3</sup> I have entered into this project with an understanding of the arguments of both Michael (2000) and Hills (2002) regarding the scholar-fan. For more on this, see the Preface.

Instead it sounds like what we might think of as more ‘casual’ fans—those people we know who love a certain program or two and like to talk about it, but would not consider going to a convention or creating connections online. These are the people termed everyday fans in the present study. What most conceive of as “fans,” Abercrombie and Longhurst place in the cultist camp: “cultists are more organized than fans. They meet each other and circulate specialized materials that constitute the nodes of a *network*” (139, original emphasis). Even beyond cultists are enthusiasts, for whom “there is likely to be little time left over to sleep let alone read/view other mass-circulated texts” (139). The most devoted *Star Trek* fans that Jenkins (1992) discusses belong here, they claim.

This new classification begs the question: If the “fans” that scholars have been studying all along are really cultists and enthusiasts, what about those whom Abercrombie and Longhurst call “fans?” By constructing their continuum, Abercrombie and Longhurst inadvertently expose a deficiency in the literature. This study focuses not only on those people previously called “fans”—termed cultists and enthusiasts on the continuum—but also those previously overlooked and now termed as fans. I call these two groups cultists/enthusiasts and everyday fans, respectively, for the purpose of this study. By investigating the experience of fans, cultists, and enthusiasts, this research aims to flesh out Abercrombie and Longhurst’s continuum and give a better idea of how a range of viewers are understanding and interacting with a specific television show.

Particularly relevant to understanding the experience of cultists and enthusiasts is looking at the recent rise in Internet activity by TV viewers, to be discussed further in Chapter 4. Fan online activity has begun to take center stage in fan studies. One of the characteristics of the current television era—called TVIII, the third major era—is the

fragmentation of television and viewer activity not only across different channels but also across technologies such as DVDs and the Internet (Pearson 2009; Tkachuk 2009). With the advent of the Internet, fan activity has expanded beyond conventions, personal correspondences, and fanzines to invade cyberspace. Mittell (2010) explains that, “as the technology has emerged, online fan sites have become the most common and accessible way for fans to create and share their tribute to a favored program” (375). Jenkins (2006) has termed the new merging of media platforms in the audience experience, “convergence culture.” As the arena for fan activity has changed, so fan studies have shifted focus.

The understanding of audiences and fans in particular has greatly progressed since the Frankfurt School’s conception of cultural dupes and passive viewers. Pierre Bourdieu examined the stratification of tastes and provided a sociological explanation for the stigmatization of certain groups, like fans. Henry Jenkins attempted to wipe out—or at least fight—the stigmatization of fans through an ethnography of the notorious *Star Trek* fans. Matt Hills and other fan scholars who followed in his footsteps took issue with certain aspects of his approach and findings but generally agreed with the theory he had produced. Abercrombie and Longhurst worked to further detail our understanding of audiences and split the broad term “fan” into more specific categories, revealing a gap in the literature. Those that they term fans—as opposed to cultists and enthusiasts—have received relatively little academic attention sociologically. This study hopes to begin to fill that gap.

## Chapter 3

### **“Everything Happens for a Reason”: Television Trends that Paved the Way for LOST**

Television has garnered great praise—but mostly criticism. Despite the recent advancements in pro-television literature—including Steven Johnson’s *Everything Bad is Good For You*—mothers are still berating their children with platitudes about how watching too much television rots brains. If we step beyond simply talking about television *abstract*, discussion of the actual *content* on television brings us face to face with an even harsher body of commentary: too much sex, too much violence, and too much profanity (Strauss 2010; Dotinga 2011). Speaking out against the pervading belief that “TV is bad” are not only pop culture defenders such as Johnson, but also fan theorists, discussed in the previous chapter. Amidst the deluge of anti-television messages coming from all sides, however, these dissenting voices can easily be, well, *lost*.

Johnson (2005) argues for popular culture by focusing on what he calls the ‘Sleeper Curve’:

Popular culture has, on average, grown more complex and intellectually challenging over the past thirty years. [Where others see decline] I see a progressive story: mass culture growing more sophisticated, demanding more cognitive engagement with each passing year. Think of it as a kind of positive brainwashing : the popular media steadily, but almost imperceptibly, making our minds sharper. (P. xv)

Johnson takes a rather general approach to defending popular culture as a whole; he cites increased complexity on a narrative and moral level for why television specifically exhibits his Sleeper Curve. His work, however, has received a large amount of criticism:



as Janet Maslin (2005) of *The New York Times* pointed out, hard evidence is “rare” and the arguments seem unfounded on anything but personal anecdotes. Other critics have pointed out similar flaws, but laud Johnson’s ideas and seem shy to dismiss them as incorrect, despite the lack of evidence (Kirn 2005; Zeitchik 2005).

The recent boom in research that puts both television and fans in a positive light begs the question: *Why now?* Johnson’s Sleeper Curve suggests that television is currently at the most complex and challenging point it has ever reached. But what got it there? Since the turn of the century television screens have lit up with an astounding line up of acclaimed series: *The West Wing*, *Six Feet Under*, *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Dexter*, *Sex and the City*, *Lost*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*. McCabe and Akass (2007) called for an academic conference to investigate “this new wave of critically acclaimed drama hitting our screens” (1). Suddenly TV viewers everywhere have their pick of intriguing and rewarding programs. Even a television addict like myself has trouble keeping up with all the ‘must-see’ shows currently airing. This is not to say that before the turn of the century all television was terrible. Proposing any such statement would no doubt result in nothing short of invective from fans of *Star Trek* and *Buffy*, not to mention those who loved classics such as *I Love Lucy* and *The Cosby Show*. But something about the current television environment is perfect for fostering the creation, proliferation, and success of what have come to be colloquially termed “quality” shows. What is it about now—about the current television environment—that lends itself to producing outstanding series? In order to answer this question—in the words of Jack Shephard—*We have to go back*.

We have to go back to a time when television looked nothing like it does now, back to a time when “cult,” “quality,” and “mainstream” television were all separate

entities. “Mainstream” requires little to no explanation: it’s what’s hugely popular, what most people watch, what the main networks air. The other two concepts, however, are much more slippery. Both were originally conceived as inherently defined by what they were *not*—that is, *not* mainstream. Ironically, however, these definitions have been flipped on their heads. In recent decades, cult, quality, and mainstream have merged.

Angelini and Booy (2010) use the ideas of Umberto Eco to estimate that “cult television...can be more or less dated from the mid-sixties on either side of the Atlantic” (22). On this side of the Atlantic, this inevitably brings us to *Star Trek*, “the fount and origin of all things cult” (Pearson, 2010, p. 9). Most scholars have focused on defining cult TV by audience and fan activity, though some such as Wilcox (2010) have tried to define it in textual and narrative terms. Espenson (2010) says simply: “Cult TV shows are the ones that attract a cult. I take that to mean an involved viewership. Not necessarily large or small, but involved” (45). Espenson’s dismissal of the size of a cult audience, however, goes against most fundamental understandings of the term. As mentioned above, cult TV is inherently characterized by what it is not. Matt Hills (2010) argues that, “something that many uses of the term ‘cult’ tend to share is a sense of what cult is *not*. It is not hugely popular, not culturally omnipresent, not commonplace and common knowledge” (67). Combining these two approaches to nailing down what it means for a show to be considered cult, Gwenllian-Jones and Pearson (2004) define the term as follows: “any television programme that is considered offbeat or edgy, that draws a niche audience, that has a nostalgic appeal, that is considered emblematic of a particular subculture, or that is considered ‘hip’” (ix). Traditionally, cult shows like *Star Trek*, *Buffy* or *Babylon 5* create audiences that are small and devoted. Cult fans are thought of as

those who let shows become part of their lives, watch and re-watch, discuss and re-discuss, never tiring of the investigation and explication of a certain show. Brooker (2009) notes that “a significant part of the cult television experience involves sharing theories, bouncing ideas off fellow fans, picking apart the last episode and guessing about those to come” (57). Cult TV fans have historically been known as active fans—they parse a television text, like the *Star Trek* fans Jenkins (1992) describes. Devotion to cult programs tends to outlast devotion to more mainstream shows; Angelini and Booy (2010) explain that, “the cult text is never consumed...in its reading. It is always available, complete, and undiminished, bristling with new moments to be activated” (26). Cult fans visit and re-visit a program, delving deeper and deeper into its text. This activity and the idea of “cult” in general are juxtaposed directly against what is mainstream.

“Quality” television likewise has gained definition mainly from what it is not—common, and again, mainstream. Roberta Pearson (2010) rather forebodingly remarks that, “quality is an even more elusive term than cult, inherently founded upon arbitrary taste judgments” (14). These judgments are typically made by those with higher cultural capital—those people who have higher levels of education and a more “refined” taste. Pearson (2010) continues her discussion of quality TV by saying that it “began as a niche-broadcasting phenomenon aimed at the ‘right’ demographics, that is, viewers with the educational capital to respond to quality programmes’ literary aesthetics and with the economic capital to purchase products offered by sponsors” (15). Quality has been associated not only with those who are more highly educated, more well-read people but also with those who are wealthier. Historically it has largely been reserved for the upper echelons—in both an intellectual and an economical sense—of society. On the main

networks—the realm of the mainstream, the common people—quality used to only appear sparingly, existing as what Thompson (2007) calls “very specialized offerings of the networks” (xvii). With the boom of cable, quality television began to evolve. Eventually certain cable networks became associated with quality—most notably, of course, HBO. Responsible for several of the programs that usually receive the stamp of quality, HBO even brands itself as being intrinsically different from the mainstream—*It’s not TV, it’s HBO*. Thompson (2007) rightfully points out that “the phrase ‘an HBO-style series’ has, in fact, now trumped ‘quality TV’ as a description of high artistic achievement in the medium” (xviii). The fact that HBO is a pay subscription channel further emphasizes the role that economic distinction has played in the story of quality television.

Despite the fact that both cult and quality have been formulated as specifically (and often intentionally) distinct from the mainstream, recent years have seen the merging of all three. While many quality programs remain on more exclusive cable networks like HBO or Showtime, more and more quality programs are emerging on mainstream networks; NBC’s *The West Wing* is perhaps the most obvious—and agreed upon—example, being the focus of much discussion in Janet McCabe and Kim Akass’s compilation work *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*. Many point to NBC’s serial police drama *Hill Street Blues* as establishing the quality category on a mainstream network years earlier (McCabe and Akass, 2007). Thompson (2007) explains the point at which he believes quality broke into the mainstream: “In the early 1990s, something remarkable happened. *NYPD Blue* and *ER* reached Nielsen’s top 10, and suddenly the quality TV aesthetic, which had been making modest inroads on the

primetime schedules for years, started spreading like a virus” (xvii). These paved the way for others deemed deserving of the quality label, such as *Lost*, *Ally McBeal*, *St. Elsewhere*, and *Desperate Housewives*. Whether or not these programs measure up to the quality standards set by cable hits such as *Mad Men*, *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Sex and the City*, and *Six Feet Under* is an issue of judgment that extends beyond the purview of the present study. Regardless of the gradations of quality, it is apparent that the mainstream networks have enjoyed an unusually strong influx of quality programs in recent years.

Seemingly even less compatible than quality and mainstream TV are cult and mainstream TV. Indeed Abbott (2009) notes that even the term “ ‘cult blockbuster’ [is] potentially contradictory and contentious” (11). And yet the evidence of the merging of these two categories is even more extensive and convincing than that for the merging of quality and mainstream. One particular aspect of cult television has helped ensure that cult shows are now popping up on mainstream networks: the devotion of the cult audience. As networks and producers realized that a cult audience is a devoted audience—and a devoted audience will tune in every week, buy show paraphernalia and turn other people on to the show—they began targeting such an audience. Abbott (2010) explains that “networks might hope for the large broadcast figures associated with mainstream television, but they also want their shows to generate the audience commitment associated with cult TV” (1). As Espenson (2010) notes, “a cult show demands that [viewers] stop being distracted and face front” (47) and nothing appeals more to network executives (and the advertisers to whom they are selling time) than a rapt audience. Indeed Robson (2010) notes that “it’s easy to see that today’s ‘cult’

audience is the one that the media moguls want watching their shows, the more viewers, the merrier—and the more lucrative a series' franchise becomes" (220). Networks also seek cult audiences for the fan activity on the Internet that comes hand in hand: "The major American networks...utilize the internet as a primary source for viewer interaction and television series information, and as a conduit for media products" (Robson 2010, 219). Brooker (2009) states that, "almost every mainstream TV show will now at least pay lip-service to Internet immersion, offering some official online reference to its fictional world" (53). And so, because of strong profit motive, cult and mainstream have collided. The cult audience, "once labeled as socially unacceptable...is, in all actuality, today's mainstream" (Robson 2010, p. 220).

Most recently, ABC's *Lost* and NBC's *Heroes* have achieved both cult and mainstream status. The transition from the old cult/mainstream dichotomy to these new hybrid shows was not a completely smooth one; to demonstrate this, we need look no further than the cautionary case of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*, which originally aired on ABC. Popular in its first season but completely disastrous by its second, "the case of *Twin Peaks* demonstrates how tentatively 'cult' TV exists in network television" (Angelini and Booy, 2010, p. 23). Whereas *Heroes* was another case that burned bright and burned out fast (barely anyone admits to liking any season but the first), *Lost* was not.

*Lost* stands as the perfect example of the modern merging of cult, quality, and mainstream. In addition to being aired on one of the main networks—ABC—the show averaged 16.2 million viewers for season one, won multiple Emmy awards, and a Golden Globe (Abbot 2009; Porter and Lavery 2006). *Lost* is no small-time production. Scholars

and critics have used the terms “blockbuster” (Abbot 2009, p. 9), “runaway...success” (Lachonis and Johnston 2008, p. 3), “mega-global hit” (Pearson 2007, p. 239) and “international megahit” (Johnson 2005, p. 204) in describing the program. Beyond the millions that watched the series as it progressed in its first run on ABC from 2004 to 2010, more and more are now joining the bandwagon even after the show’s conclusion. The combination of the availability of DVD sets and the fact that all six seasons of the show are available to watch instantly on Netflix keeps the number of *Lost* viewers and fans rising. In fact, several of the individuals interviewed for this study saw most or all of the show in some form other than its original—whether it be on DVD, online streaming, or Netflix.<sup>4</sup> With audiences reaching over 20 million at times during its run on the air, Putting aside how, when, or why people watched the series, one thing is clear: *millions of people have watched Lost* (Gorman 2010). Looking more closely behind the scenes, “the production style and budget for the series definitely highlights the show’s blockbuster credentials” (Abbot 2009, p. 14). Both in terms of audience size and production value, *Lost* is clearly mainstream.

The show has also garnered the title of “quality.” Born in the era of such cable behemoths as *The Sopranos* and *The Wire*, *Lost* was a surprise return punch on the part of ABC. As Thompson (2007) explains: “Broadcasting executives worried about their networks’ futures in the face of *The Sopranos*. One response was to lean heavily upon the procedural dramatic franchises like *Law & Order* and *CSI*...the other was to load their schedules with reality TV” (xix). With its complex narrative, long story arcs, and own mythology, *Lost* is everything a procedural drama is not, and it certainly is not reality TV.

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<sup>4</sup> For the specific results of these interviews see Chapters 5 and 6.

In the face of the temptation to step down and allow HBO and similar networks to monopolize quality television, ABC took a risk—in more than one way—with *Lost*. *The Hollywood Reporter* called the show the “rare combination of a critical and commercial hit” (Andreeva 2006). Over the course of its six-season run, *Lost* was nominated for a total of 53 Emmy Awards, winning the Emmy for “Outstanding Drama Series” in its first season. The series was nominated for the Golden Globe for “Best Television Drama Series” three times, and won in 2006. Well-decorated with both the nominations and trophies of award ceremonies, the show has demonstrated that modern quality *can* exist outside of HBO and its fellow higher-brow cable friends such as Showtime.

The final remaining piece of the puzzle of *Lost* is its cult status. After the failure of *Twin Peaks*, both critics and scholars were skeptical of the potential success of cult in the mainstream. Sharing *Peaks*’ penchant for mystery, clues, and complex narrative, *Lost* managed to do what its predecessor could not: maintain an audience. The key to this was ensuring that *Lost* would be accessible on several levels. Matt Hills (2010) argues:

*Lost*...is another prime candidate for contemporary ‘mainstream cult’ status...It is filled with clues, details, and narrative layers which can incite and support the types of fan activity linked to ‘cult’ status (Jenkins 2006), and it seems to demand highly focused, attentive viewing...*Lost* may be ‘cultish’ but it is arguably designed to operate on different levels for audiences who desire to consume it more-or-less intently or to work with it more-or-less casually (P. 71-2).

As Hills describes, the broadening of the intended audience to include more than just the hard-core cult fans helped spell success for the show. This broadening, however, does not take away from *Lost*’s cult status. The kind of cult we see in *Lost* is simply the kind of cult that can exist in the mainstream. Pearson (2010) states that in “attracting much



bigger audiences than cult hits such as *Buffy* while demonstrating the neat fit between a cult sensibility and the multiple profit points of TV3, *Lost* has dragged cult into the mainstream” (12). Viewers, eager to unravel the complex and murky mysteries of *Lost*, embody precisely what it means to be cult fans. And yet, this isn’t the small, niche audience that cult TV theorists talk about—this is the mainstream.

*Lost* has indeed dragged cult into the mainstream and along with it, cult audience activity. The cult activity previously reserved for fans of shows like *Star Trek* and *Buffy* is now being seen with viewers of a mainstream hit. Robson (2010) outlines this phenomenon:

Ten years ago, cult series were identified by their small, anti-mainstream audience. Today, a cult audience is praised by the media and the cult series has gone mainstream—*Lost* is a prime example, with millions of viewers worldwide puzzling over the series’ enigmas, its mysteries and meaning. (P. 220)

With the merging of cult and mainstream *television* has come the merging of cult and mainstream *audiences* and, as a result, mainstream audiences are solving puzzles and hunting clues in ways they never have before. Mainstream audiences—once stereotyped as drooling over simple programs that allowed them to passively disengage—aren’t sitting back and tuning out anymore.

*Lost* is what it is because of the merging of cult, quality, and mainstream. Without any one of these three components, the show would lose integral aspects of its identity—that much is obvious. Less obvious, perhaps, is how vital these three components are for bringing about the *Lost* audience we have seen since its premiere in 2004. If the character of *Lost* changes, then its audience changes along with it. Thus for a study such as this that

focuses on the experience of the viewers and fans of a show, it is of primary importance to establish what the show is—its context, where it came from. *Lost* comes at a point in television history when three originally distinct entities—cult TV, quality TV, and mainstream TV—have collided. *Lost* not only has the devoted and invested fans of a cult show, but also the large audience of a mainstream show and the critical acclaim of a quality show. The fact that the show is the convergence point of the recent merging of these three types of television certainly colors the actual content of the program, which is of course what viewers see. By looking deeper into the text of *Lost* in the next chapter, we will be able to better understand why this cult/quality/mainstream hybrid is causing the waxing of audience intellectual activity and the waning of mental passivity.

## Chapter 4

### **“Where Are We?”: An Introduction to *Lost* and the Audience It Has Created**

An island. A plane crash. A smoke monster, a polar bear, and a hatch in the ground. This vague string of ideas probably comprises the extent of knowledge most people have about *Lost*. Whether for time or taste reasons, the majority of people you meet have not seen *that show about the weird island*. For those who haven't yet had the pleasure—and maybe never want to—this chapter aims to give a basic understanding of the program's content and structure to facilitate an easier reading of the empirical chapters that follow.

The series pilot opens with an iconic scene of an eye bursting open. A man dressed in a suit is lying on his back amidst bamboo with his face scratched and clothing torn. He races through the jungle disoriented until breaking onto a seemingly calm, picturesque beach. As he turns to his left, the noise escalates and utter chaos is revealed as the fuselage of a wrecked plane is smoking, a detached engine roaring, and countless people screaming and running about. These are the 48 survivors of Oceanic flight 815 from Sydney—headed to Los Angeles but crashed on an unknown Pacific island. Our protagonist, the man in the suit, is Jack Shephard (*Party of Five*'s Matthew Fox), a handsome doctor who immediately takes the lead and helps everyone within sight. Fans and critics alike have gushed over this opening sequence. Mittell (2010) comments on the filming effects, saying they “generate a sense of intensity and anxiety more common to Hollywood action movies than to most television programs” (261). The two-part pilot proceeds from the initial chaotic scene into what one would expect of a plane-crashed-on-an-island story—assessing supplies, treating wounds, awaiting rescue. Then, in the last

moments of the pilot, a mysterious *chicka-chicka* mechanical noise explodes from the jungle and trees are seemingly mowed down by an unknown entity. One of the survivors, Charlie Pace (*Lord of the Rings*' Dominic Monaghan) asks, "Where are we?"

This question drives the series all the way to its finale in May 2010, six seasons and almost seven years after its premiere in September 2004. Created by J.J. Abrams and written mainly by Damon Lindeloff and Carlton Cuse<sup>5</sup>, *Lost* makes a point of centering on questions. The show makes audiences follow two main mysteries: the mystery of the island and the mystery of the characters. The island—with its black smoke monster that attacks people, unexplained polar bear appearances in the jungle, and metal hatch to who-knows-where in the ground—has plenty of sci-fi mystery surrounding it. The characters, "a multicultural mix, a microcosm of the world," (Patterson 2011, 279) are mysteries themselves. For the first three seasons, episodes feature flashbacks focusing on specific characters. Slowly viewers unravel the mysteries of the characters' identities and gain insight into what makes them tick. We learn that the seemingly perfect doctor has daddy issues and the freckled beauty is wanted for murder. The estranged Korean couple was once madly in love and the rock star has a heroin addiction. We also learn that the survivors are more connected than we thought—in life *before* the island.

As the web of connection grows more complicated, more and more questions are raised and mysteries presented. Through a terrifying series of events it is discovered that there are "Others" on the island who are less than hospitable. One survivor, John Locke (Terry O'Quinn) finds a metal hatch in the ground. A mysterious French woman who

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<sup>5</sup> For a complete account of the creation of the show from conception at ABC to the point where Lindeloff and Cuse took the reigns, see Lachonis and Johnston (2008).

lives in the jungle warns of an “infection.” Amidst and throughout all this, the group of survivors tries desperately to find out where they are and how to get back home. Sayid Jarrah (Naveen Andrews), a former member of the Iraqi Republican Guard, tries to build a transceiver to locate a radio tower on the island. Desperate dad Michael Dawson (*Oz*’s Harold Perrineau) uses his engineering skills to build a raft. The show initially focuses on a handful of the 48 survivors, but focus shifts as the Others are introduced, the survivors of the tail section of the plane appear, and still others come to the island. The question most people who have not seen the show ask is “Do they ever make it off the island?” Any *Lost* fan will tell you that this question is in many ways irrelevant to how the story actually unfolds. The question they should be asking is, “Why are they there?” It is the answer to this question that ultimately reveals much of the mystery of the series.

*Lost* fans will agree that the prospect of explaining the program to non-watchers in a short chapter is nothing short of daunting. No doubt to someone who has not seen the show, the above description paints at best a vague picture. Described by many fans as one of the most complex—if not *the* most complex—TV shows they’ve ever viewed, *Lost* is notorious for its complicated plot lines, unexplained mysteries, and religious and philosophical references. The intricacies of these mysteries and story arcs would be impossible to describe in this limited space—Nikki Stafford’s series *Finding LOST* devotes five entire books to the series. Indeed Lee (2011) argues that *Lost*, “profoundly changed our expectations about the topics and level of complexity that may be achieved by a TV series on a commercial network” (120). The show’s identity as a serial narrative, as opposed to the episodic procedural shows that populate the main networks (e.g. *Law & Order*, *CSI*, and *House, M.D.*) lends itself to this complexity. Television scholar Jason

Mittell (2009) discusses how, “unlike nearly every other television series, *Lost* features no stand-alone episodes, no ‘monsters-of-the-week’” (125). While each episode may have a localized problem or issue it focuses on, most story lines cross two or more episodes—some the entire six seasons of the series.

The serial narrative structure of the series requires viewers not only to pay attention while watching but also to tune in to every episode. Vital information for a story arc can be missed just by failing to catch a few scenes—or even a moment—in a past episode. The intense attention this requires is apparent to any viewer. Mittell (2009) states that “*Lost*’s narrative structure encourages viewers to parse the show more than simply consume it...[it] discourages casual consumption [and] demands a hyper-attentive mode of spectatorship” (128). Indeed *Lost*’s complex plot is part of a new wave of narrative complexity permeating recent television shows (Mittell 2006). Its long story arcs, countless cliffhangers, and unanswered questions all create an audience with rapt attention. What Johnson (2005) says of *24* can also be said of *Lost*: “Even if you *have* been following the season closely, you’ll still find yourself straining to keep track of the plot, precisely because so many relationships are at play” (114, original emphasis). Viewers must constantly be on the lookout for what *Lost* fans call “Easter eggs”: “anything that is more than what it seems to be within a frame of film, an episode or the show as a whole” (Lachonis and Johnston 2008, 152). This may be a series of numbers that appear over and over, or a symbol that can be seen on a shark fin, or even the name of a character. Viewers’ eyes are glued to the screen, their fingers on the PAUSE button ready to freeze-frame if necessary. Inevitably, however, some clues and eggs will escape one’s notice. No *Lost* viewer can catch everything.

In the previous television eras, this meant that audience members had to wait for reruns to parse over again. In the TVIII era, however, viewers have a new platform to which they can look for answers: the Internet. Oromaner (2008) argues that, “*Lost* has been hugely influential in getting jaded TV viewers interactively involved in a show, as its many clues encourage them to search the Internet for answers” (vii). The *Lost* “narrative design in no small way demands the Internet as a site in which viewers can seek information, engage in their own theory-making, and...voice concerns and ideas” (Ross 2008, 9). *Lost* viewers who want to puzzle everything together, missing no clue however small or intricate, have to rely on external sources for help. Those who cannot get this from immediate day-to-day peer groups can now turn to the Internet. *Lost* in particular embraced the new multimedia options. Clark (2009) calls *Lost* “the first television program to capitalize on the in-depth storytelling and fan interactions made possible through the Internet and its related technologies” (320). The expansion of television shows into web space has been termed “transmedia” (Kinder 1991) storytelling. Jenkins (2007) explains that it, “represents a process where integral elements of fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (Part 1). A show’s fictional world is no longer trapped within the four sides of a television screen—it has bled into numerous new forms of technology, further bringing the fiction to life. *Lost* embodies this—Pearson (2010) goes so far as to call it the “vanguard of...trans-media storytelling” (12). Mittell (2010) argues that, “a show with a complex mythology will often generate highly elaborate fansites dedicated to solving the show’s mysteries and chronicling its plot” (376). Ross (2008) agrees: “ ‘messy,’ or complicated, texts such as

*Lost*...rely on obscured invitations to move viewers to the Internet (and elsewhere) in pursuit of narrative enhancements” (173). Clarke (2008) says of *Lost*:

The complexity of the storyline made this television program an ideal candidate for a participatory online culture, and thus it is not surprising that various popular cultural phenomena dedicated to *Lost* had offered fans the opportunity to examine and interact with the series in more detail. (P. 144)

The fan experience has revolutionized with the introduction of the Internet as a platform for activity. For this study, online activity became particularly pertinent in the interviews with the super fans, the results of which are outlined in Chapter 6.

In general, TV viewer Internet activity takes many forms. After conducting a survey of over 3000 Internet-active fans, Costello and Moore (2007) found that “audience activity ranged from minimal involvement such as simple information acquisition...to fully engaged viewers seeking interaction with other fans” (130). The *Lost* fandom has at its disposal every type of fan site. *Lost* blogs seem countless. Porter and Lavery (2006) note that for the show, “LiveJournals and blogs dedicated to theory and speculation only augmented the intense conversations already underway on message boards across the Web” (165). Certain personal blogs have gained notoriety and respect among fans, including *Finding LOST* series author Nikki Stafford’s “Nik at Nite” ([nikkistafford.blogspot.com](http://nikkistafford.blogspot.com)), Jo Garfein’s “Get LOST with JOpinionated” ([jopinionated.blogspot.com](http://jopinionated.blogspot.com)), and Jon Lachonis’ “DocArzt’s LOST Blog” ([www.docarzt.com](http://www.docarzt.com)). Other less personally based sites like “DarkUFO” ([darkufo.blogspot.com](http://darkufo.blogspot.com)) include not only essays on episodes and series trends but



spoilers<sup>6</sup>, polls, and further entertainment options. The topics covered by *Lost* blogs range from gossipy details about the stars of the show to the religious and philosophical themes and implications of plot happenings or references. Specific topics aside, Berman (2010) calls *Lost*, “undoubtedly the most written/blogged about TV series ever” (50).

On the more interactive end of the fan site scale are the fan forums. These forums allow TV viewers across the nation as well as the entire world to gather and discuss characters, episodes, theories, gossip, and minutiae. For *Lost*, one fan forum gained prominence above the rest: The Fuselage ([www.thefuselage.com](http://www.thefuselage.com)). Lachonis and Johnston (2008) argue:

The Fuselage was and still is the very heart of the fandom; practically every other popular *Lost* site, whether it be a forum, blog or informational site, sprouted from its beating core. Fans initially come to “the Fuse” or “the Lage” in awe, amazed that they can actually post directly to a VIP—a real live conduit to this amazing show. (P. 25)

The “VIP”s of which they speak are “Very Important Posters”: cast members and show creators. Particularly frequent and prominent posters included Jorge Garcia (who plays Hurley), J.J. Abrams (the show’s creator), and writers Damon Lindeloff and Carlton Cuse. On the website, any fan had the ability to post to a VIP and often received direct responses. Lachonis and Johnston describe it as follows: “Within the realm of The Fuselage, the wall that typically separates the show’s creators and its fans is practically nonexistent” (19). The site, however, did not center solely around this access to showrunners and stars—it also hosted threads for each individual episode, each thread

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<sup>6</sup> Spoilers are bits of information about a show that reveal future events or give answers to puzzles or explanations for mysteries in advance. For example, a spoiler might reveal that Kate is the fugitive before the episode providing that information is aired.

itself boasting thousands upon thousands of posts. The fan forums for *Lost*, like those for other television shows, are essentially sites of discussion.

The depth of this discussion, however, has been questioned. Clark (2008) sought to investigate the depth of discussion in *Lost* fan forums about religion. The show hosts not only traditional Judeo-Christian themes but also ideas from Eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism. Clark found, however, that:

Put simply, the barriers are too high for meaningful intercultural conversations in online fan communities. This does not eliminate discussions of popular culture from intercultural communication efforts; it merely points to the fact that rarely do meaningful exchanges happen online in venues dedicated not to the exchange but to the cultural product itself. (P. 31)

Her analysis found that conversation often settled at the level of gossip or focused on rather irrelevant topics in most fan forums. Interestingly, however, Clark (2009) declares that online fan forums “have become a forum for thoughtful discussions about religion that cross faith commitments” (341). Lachonis and Johnston (2008) argue for the depth of discussion found on one specific fan forum called The Fuselage. The four cultists/enthusiasts interviewed for this study argue from personal experience about the depth of discussion on certain blogs. Whether or not fan discussion reaches or remains at a very deep level, fan forums nonetheless provide tech savvy fans with a place to hear theories, bounce off ideas, and learn other perspectives.

*Lost* also boasts its own fan wiki, Lostpedia (<http://lostpedia.wikia.com>). Fan wikis—“Wikipedia-like, open source websites” (Robson 2010, 219-220)—are sites that catalogue information about shows, each page focusing on a particular aspect. Currently including 7,260 entries, Lostpedia has information on episodes, characters, stars, themes,

and the minutest details about *Lost*. Members of the *Lost* fan community provide all the information—some may contribute pages of information, others small details. As Booth (2009) explains it, this “‘collective intelligence’ of the fan community becomes the key to this construction as each individual member of the fan community might have different knowledge bases” (384). No one *Lost* viewer could have created Lostpedia—its very existence is due to the collaboration of many thousands of individuals. With more and more contributors, a fan wiki naturally gains detail and breadth (Booth 2009). This essential contribution makes Lostpedia a “byproduct of the fan community as a whole” (Tkachuk 2009, 99).

The producers of *Lost* gave fans yet another option for online activity in the form of the alternate reality game (ARG) “The Lost Experience” (TLE). ARGs immerse fans in a fictional world—in this case, the world of *Lost*—by having them participate in various game or puzzle activities like clue finding. Essentially a multimedia scavenger hunt, TLE had *Lost* fans hunting for clues about the fictional Hanso Foundation—mentioned in the show itself but not integral to the plot (it is the parent company of the Dharma Initiative). The ARG was created in the hiatus between seasons two and three in the summer of 2006. Fans were led from clue to clue throughout several official stages of the game, investigating phone calls and emails, watching fictional Jimmy Kimmel interviews, and hunting the Internet. Like the fan forums and wiki pages, ARGs often require communal cooperation “to win past the more difficult hurdles” (Brooker 2009, 54). As TLE took on the character of a real-life puzzle, the “boundary between viewer and participant” (Brooker 2009, 57) for *Lost* audience members was blurred.

Of course, all the online fan activity described above points to activity rather than the passivity traditionally ascribed to TV viewers. This Internet activity, however, is in no way a requirement for the experience and enjoyment of the show. Ross (2008) notes this point, saying that, “one does not *have* to go online, or buy a novel, or attend Comic-Con to experience the pleasures of puzzling through the show’s narrative” (204, original emphasis). In fact, someone who has watched *Lost* after its conclusion in May 2010—whether it be on Netflix, DVD, or online streaming—does not have the opportunity to engage in all of the above-described online activities. Archives of the blogs and fan forums remain, but the activity has definitively waned.

It is important to note that *Lost* is an open text (Tkachuk 2009). While it raises question after question, many answers are left for viewers to interpret individually. Ross (2008) argues:

*Lost...emphasizes constantly the possibility that there might be multiple explanations for what is occurring to its characters, largely through the competing and intersecting back-stories of its sprawling ensemble cast. (P. 206)*

Viewers are allowed to make meaning from *Lost* as they will—there are no definite answers and no “right” interpretations. Taliaferro and Kastrul (2011) note that what makes the show “special” is indeed how it is able to “present a story in such a way as to leave it open to multiple interpretations” (83). Some fans loved this; others hated it. Sadly, those thirsty for definite answers and neat explanations were ultimately disappointed. *Lost* left certain viewers pleased and others frustrated as it encouraged each audience member to create his or her own interpretation. Though Taliaferro and Kastrul (2011) are correct when they say, “If you talk to ten different *Lost* fans, be prepared to

receive ten unique perspectives about what has transpired on the show,” (89) the following chapter demonstrates how, though interpretations may vary, the mental activity fans go through in making these interpretations follows certain patterns.

## Chapter 5

### **“We’re Going to Have to Watch that Again...”: Results from Interviews with Everyday Fans**

Are fans of *Lost* engaging with issues of academic or everyday philosophy just by virtue of watching the show? If so, are they aware of this phenomenon? These research questions drove the conversations with everyday fans. The interviews sought to provide an understanding of whether these fans were engaging in intellectual activities by viewing the show and following its storylines and characters. *Lost* raises philosophical themes of a more academic nature by naming characters after philosophers and openly dealing with good versus evil and science versus faith. It also raises questions of an everyday philosophical nature—“How should I act?” “Can I redeem myself from a bad past?” “What do I owe to others?” “Could I be a leader?” The interviews with everyday fans aimed to gain a better understanding of this level of fandom and how both types of philosophy played into their experience of the show.

The sixteen everyday fans that composed the first sample fit perfectly into what Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) call the “fan” segment of the audience continuum. These individuals were not in contact with any other fans except “through day-to-day contact with peers” (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p. 138). They practiced “relatively heavy mass media use,” (138) with the exception of two of the participants. Abercrombie and Longhurst use two types of skills—technical and analytical—to help differentiate segments of the continuum. None of the everyday fans had gone as far as using technical skills to produce fan fiction or videos—a key component of the cultist segment of the continuum. One student had written two academic papers about *Lost* for a

Communications class, but this was the nearest to the cultist segment any of the sixteen leaned. Analytical skills went beyond the simple “I do/don’t like it” level of the consumer segment of the continuum, but generally did not reach the level of “exceptionally developed” (145) genre and comparative analysis that characterize cultists. By clearly belonging to the “fan” segment of the continuum, these everyday fans constitute a segment of the television audience that as yet has been largely overlooked by researchers, as opposed to the cultists/enthusiasts who have received a great deal of attention in recent years. The interviews with these people are some of the first steps toward filling the gap in the literature as it stands.

Interviewees were asked an opening series of questions to establish a general understanding of their television watching habits, online activity and social connections. All but two individuals reported having seen a decent number of shows and watching television relatively often. Most noted that the move from high school to college had significantly changed their television watching habits. Several explained that less free time in college had caused them to watch less television than their schedule in high school had allowed. Instead of the “channel surfing” of high school, as one senior put it, most participants now targeted a few shows and watched them in order, not live, but online or using DVDs. Alex, a junior, explained: “I’ll get stuck on a show and use it as a study break.” Mike, a sophomore, commented: “I’ve gotten more into watching the entire series of something rather than watching just an episode of *Scrubs*,” and fellow sophomore John shared the same sentiment: “I’ll usually pick a show and watch it all.” Few said that they normally watched television *on television*—with most following their shows of choice using Netflix, Hulu, and online streaming. While the students listed

everything from *Toddlers and Tiaras* to *The Sopranos* as their favorite shows, a few made note of their penchant for dramas or serial narratives because, as senior Patrick explained, “Those are shows that keep me going back because they have storylines.” The two participants who did not follow the general pattern of television watching had basically watched no television (with the exception of the occasional dabble in sports, for one) besides having gone through *Lost*. Most, however, described watching television as often as their schedule would allow, focusing on only one or two shows at a time and using the Internet to do so.

In order to get a rudimentary idea of how passionately these everyday fans felt about the show, they were asked to try and quantify their fandom on a scale of one to ten, one being the most casual *Lost* fans who had seen a number of episodes or a season or two and generally liked what they saw, and ten being the most ardent *Lost* fans that exist. This question was not intended to garner statistically significant results but simply to give a better understanding of how strongly each individual felt about the program, which in turn helped to shape the remaining portions of each interview. Even though the participants’ activities put them in the “fan” segment of Abercrombie and Longhurst’s continuum, their answers to this quantification question generally reflected a high level of passion for the show and a feeling of being in the more enthusiastic or involved half of fans. The lowest response was a 4.5, and it was the only response below a 6. Most answered between 6.5 and 8 and one identified as a 9. While their activities may land them in the less intense half of the audience continuum, these everyday fans—with the exception of one—felt that their enthusiasm was in the higher half. Importantly, however, the participants were aware of the distinction between their own level of fandom and that



of more serious fans (the cultists and enthusiasts). Justifications for not naming higher numbers focused on not participating in those activities associated with being a more serious fan: “I’m not one of the people who has the numbers tattooed to my arm,” “I wouldn’t go to a *Lost* convention,” “If people ask me *Lost* questions, I can’t be like, ‘Bam! That’s the answer,’” and “I would never blog about it...I never wrote my theories online or stuff like that.” However high their enthusiasm for the show, the participants recognized the distinction between their own fandom and that of cultists and enthusiasts.

Particularly interesting was exploring the online activity—or more accurately, lack thereof—of these everyday fans. With the boom of online fan activity, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, it might be expected that the younger generation—supposedly the most tech-savvy and Internet-frequenting portion of the population—would contribute to this phenomenon. Not a single one of the sixteen individuals had ever participated in fan forums or blogs. Six of those interviewed mentioned using Lostpedia to look up simple information about the various unanswered questions or mysterious clues presented by the series. A few had only looked for answers online once, if that. Only one—Eric, a senior—mentioned having gone to one of the fan sites besides Lostpedia, and he mainly used this site, Dark UFO, for news about the show. Four specifically mentioned disliking the presence of spoilers on the Internet and avoiding it because of the chance of stumbling upon one. Generally, the participants used the Internet—if at all—for simple fact finding or for possible explanations to mysteries: “I looked up where their flight path would be. And then the significance of the numbers on the hatch and Hurley’s lottery ticket.” Paul, a senior, simply wanted to find “theories about the monster. That was my biggest question throughout the time.” Ali, also a senior, recalled going to Lostpedia

“whenever I saw a character I didn’t know.” The online activity of these everyday fans was vastly different and far less involved than the typical Internet fan activity on which recent fan studies research has focused. Such activity remains a part of only the experience of those in the cultist/enthusiast portions of the continuum.

The final preliminary questions asked of the sixteen interviewees centered on their experiences with friends and acquaintances that had and had not watched *Lost*. The issue of stigma has played an important role historically in the characterization and portrayal of fans, and the asking of these questions aimed to examine how stigma and deviance played into the experience of these everyday *Lost* fans. In short, it did not play in at all. Several described how people who had not watched the show would make comments like, “This is so stupid,” or “That again,” though these recollections did not make such interactions sound terribly serious or confrontational. Michael, a senior, laughed as he recalled his mother saying: “I hate this show! ‘Oh, we’re lost on this island da da da.’ Call me when they’re found!” Those that the participants encountered who had not watched *Lost* were generally simply puzzled by the level of enthusiasm directed at the show—“Why are you that into it?” “It’s just a show.” Eric, who was at the time doing a re-watch of the series with friends, explained that, “people aren’t indignant, but they find it funny, especially now that we’re watching again. They’re just kind of amused, like, ‘Haven’t you seen this already?’” Though one person said that at times non-fans could be “abrasive” and “belligerent,” most described people as doling out no worse insults than calling the show “stupid” or the fans themselves “obsessed.” In fact, many relayed that they knew a large number of people who also watched the show and thus didn’t find themselves in any sort of deviant minority. One person even recalled: “All of my English

and Writing teachers in high school...were really big fans...They tried to give us extra credit assignments that involved watching *Lost*.” For those interviewed, watching and being a fan of the show did not garner them any especial stigma or negative attention. The show itself is mainstream and the fans enjoy the social acceptance that comes along with that.

In order to answer the research questions, posed and described in Chapter 1, a relatively indirect approach was taken. Those interviewed were not initially asked point-blank whether the show had made them think. Indeed, as one aspect of the research questions centered on *unintentional* mental activity, the issue of whether these individuals were even aware of the show’s effect on them complicated matters. In order to assess whether or not watching *Lost* made these everyday fans think about important themes and everyday issues, I simply tried to get them talking. Casual conversation about how, when, and why they watched *Lost* as well as favorite and least favorite characters and plotlines provided an innocuous jumping point into deeper and more involved conversations. This ultimately revealed a great deal of thought on the part of most participants about the themes of the show and the everyday issues raised throughout the seasons. Two main patterns of thinking emerged: first, critical thinking through the puzzling out of the mysteries of the show, and second, thinking about everyday philosophy through engaging with the characters of the show.

### **Critical Thinking: Puzzling Out the Mysteries**

As mentioned in the Chapter 4 overview of the show and its structure, one of *Lost*’s primary characteristics is its never-ending presentation of mysterious elements and

puzzling clues. Viewers are shown a polar bear in the jungle with no explanation, a hatch in the ground that is not opened for half a season, and an organization called the Dharma Initiative whose motives are revealed over the course of not episodes but entire seasons. Every episode ends with frustrating cliffhangers—not to mention the season finales, which often left fans desperate for answers but months to wait. These aspects of the show provided much of the entertainment value for viewers. Most of those interviewed described how the mystery of the show was what initially drew them in and kept them coming back. Ali, a senior, recalled that upon seeing her first episode of the show, “It was kind of the mystery that caught me, because I didn’t know what the hell was going on.” Others reported similar sentiments: “I think I got hooked because of the mystery,” and “I was going to watch it just so I could know what would happen.” While going through the show, sophomore Mike explains that that mysterious questions of *Lost* were “what I was really caught up in with the show, like ‘What is the smoke monster?’ ‘What is the Dharma Initiative?’ ‘Do we know what they’re doing on this island?’ ‘What are they testing?’” Michael, another senior, echoed this, talking about the Dharma Initiative plotline: “I really liked...trying to figure out what that was, what was going on there and all the different stations. There was so much depth to the Dharma Initiative that wasn’t even revealed.”

The idea of *Lost* as a puzzle came up multiple times throughout the interviews. Katie, a senior, called the show not only a puzzle but one that was “the epitome of challenge.” Another senior, Amy, explained:

You’re constantly trying to figure out things. It’s like solving a puzzle. “What is that?” “What does that symbol

mean?” “What is this?” “How is that going to come into play?” So I guess it’s sort of like solving a puzzle or riddle.

Patrick explained that this puzzling would extend outside the time boundaries of actually watching the show:

Especially with the breaks in between [the seasons] and from week to week, I’d totally doze off in class and think, “That was interesting...What happened last week?” And try to refresh it in my head. Puzzle-y stuff. What happened last week, and how that’s going to connect to this week.

While several of those interviewed talked about thinking about “What’s going to happen?” and “What does this mean?” some mentioned how detailed their puzzling would get, as senior James describes: “I was way more interested in the minutiae. ‘Why does that statue have four toes?’ ‘What was that passing comment?’” Two individuals mentioned how thinking about the mystery aspects of the show followed them all the way to bedtime:

On Tuesday nights...I remember going to bed and being like, “Oh my god, what’s going to happen here?” “What did Jack do in this scene?” “What’s going on?” You’re just thinking, “Where did that come from?”...Just thinking about what’s going to happen. I guess most of it was theories and about what’s going to happen and what’s going to go on.

I will always remember sitting at dinner and being like, “I gotta go—*Lost* is on,” and going up to my room and watching *Lost* on this little TV...and just *waiting* to see what would happen. Seeing “L O S T” come up at the end, I would just get chills sometimes. “Screw this! I have to go to bed right now? With the smoke monster out? And I don’t know what’s going to happen? The light’s beaming up from the hatch?!”

A great deal of critical thinking and clue connecting played into the experience of the show for most of the students. The questions and cliffhangers kept their minds turning and puzzling even after the episodes had ended and for months between seasons.

Despite all this effort put into puzzling and thinking through the mysteries, one of the other things these everyday fans noted was the lack of answers ultimately provided to them. As Dave put it:

Cliffhangers—that’s what brings you back the next week...I enjoyed not knowing. I *wanted* to know, I *needed* to know, but it still—I enjoyed the puzzle. My dad has this distinction that in life there are puzzles, and there are mysteries. A puzzle is something you can solve. A mystery is something you’ll never know the answer to. *Lost* is a mystery. *24* is a puzzle.

Some people liked the lack of answers; others ultimately hated the end of the series because of it. One person explained what you have to do to ultimately enjoy the show: “Accept that not all of your questions are going to be answered.” James, who was adamant that the mysteries were the core of the show, explained: “I liked the puzzles and the mysteries, and I think that’s why the finale upset me a little bit. I think in general, I was interested in getting questions answered.” A few individuals even went as far as analyzing *why* there were no answers. As one senior jokingly put it:

JJ Abrams, f\*\*\* you for leading us on for so long. *Lost*, as in life, there are no answers. And that’s the point. It’s not when you want them and it’s not what you want....I liked being teased. I liked being poked and prodded at.

Through sharp attentiveness while watching the show to gather clues, intense puzzling about mysterious elements during and after episodes, and retrospective analyzing why

full answers were not provided, the fans demonstrated a great deal of critical thinking in dealing with the mysterious elements of *Lost*.

### **Everyday Philosophy: Engaging with Characters**

A completely different type of thinking surfaced as a result of engaging with the characters. As participants were asked initially simply who their favorite and least favorite characters were, conversation likewise began at a rather superficial level. Comments like, “I love Sawyer. Well, who doesn’t like a bad boy?” “He’s just a boss. Everyone loves Desmond,” and “I felt like he was a little b\*tchy” abounded. Several individuals commented on how certain characters were, in their words, “bad\*sses” and others were just “annoying.” These types of remarks, however, proved to be the gateway to unearthing the much deeper analyses that the fans had thought through as they watched the show. Four main patterns emerged in the resulting conversation. First, every individual revealed having engaged in character analysis as a result of watching. Second, they discussed personal identification with characters, or remote identification of peers with characters. While talking about this many discussed very *real* the characters and their experiences. Third, participants remarked on how the very real nature of characters and events seemed and how this resulted in mentally placing themselves in the characters’ positions. This led them to ponder questions like, “What would I have done in his/her place?” Finally, they described themselves as having engaged with bigger themes and issues through the medium of the characters.

#### **I. Character Analysis**

As the fans were asked further questions about *why* they loved or hated certain characters so much, many conversations shifted from surface level comments to a deeper level of character analysis. They made judgments about character progression, moral worth, and consistency in storylines. Much of the analysis of characters centered on the character development for which *Lost* is renowned. They noted how much watching and thinking about this development played into their experience of the show. One junior, Alex, talked about how much the show involved, “looking into the characters’ pasts and talking about why they ended up doing [things] and how much they changed throughout the show.” Many of those interviewed specifically focused on the story arcs of Sawyer and Jack:

I think Sawyer had such an interesting progression...He started out as this kind of brash I-want-to-be-on-the-outside kind of character, but he really demonstrates later on that not only is he a very caring person—even though he still has his moments of abject self-absorbed, self-centered, “I only care about me da da da,”—he really showed himself to be a leader.

Jack’s an interesting character—he isn’t always the most likeable. I think that his overall journey is the best—going from the ultimate Man of Science, total unbeliever [but he] eventually comes all the way around.

The characters’ changes make you think a lot, because I hated Sawyer at first, and I hated Jin...then they both became some of my favorite characters in the end.

Simply by virtue of viewing the series throughout its seasons, they reflected on characters’ moral and personal development. Several individuals judged certain events as being inconsistent with characters’ storylines. One senior boy, in talking about how Shannon and Sayid end up together, explained:



What was really frustrating for me about that is that they got to an island, met, had a lust relationship, whereas in the real world Sayid had this one woman who he devoted his entire life to...I don't feel like Sayid was necessarily better off for meeting Shannon.

Individuals weighed the varying importance and significance of the events in characters' lives to judge how things should have ended. Further discussion beyond initial superficial remarks revealed that many of the everyday fans engaged in a great deal of character analysis, ranging from thinking about a certain character's moral progression to judging actions and events as being inconsistent or inappropriate. Individuals found themselves pondering and reflecting on the characters' storylines.

## II. Personal Identification with Characters

The close engagement with characters, however, was not only made from an abstract, evaluative position. Many of the comments made throughout the interviews revealed that these fans had put a great deal of thought into which characters they or their friends were like and why. Some focused more generally on how relatable the characters and their plotlines were:

I felt like everyone was so relatable—that's the whole thing. The fact that everyone was put on the island because they were broken, and then the island...It's not the kind of show where the hero is, like, this great guy. Jack's messed up.

There is a little bit of every character inside each of us. There's a little bit of Jack, a little bit of drug-addict Charlie. Even a little bit of Shannon—everyone wants to lie on the beach and sunbathe every once in awhile.

One student drew the connection between how relatable the characters were and how real they seemed. She remarked: "I could relate to a lot of the characters, which made me feel

like they were real.” Others similarly commented on how real both the characters and their situations were:

There’re so many characters and so many human situations that they cover. You see so many different struggles, like the drug addiction—the heroin part—John Locke and his paralysis, a lot of relationship stuff, Hurley’s overweight thing, lost children...I mean there’s a lot of stuff that’s covered in the show...I think a lot of the characters had similar struggles to real people.

I think you saw in the show that the people were very real—they had their flaws, and those flaws and demons shaped them and how they reacted to situations, and their positive traits also helped them to help other people on the show or on the island—they are very human characters, with big flaws and positive qualities, too. There wasn’t really anybody on the show who was this perfect, ideal character. They all had their flaws, and that’s very human, I think.

It’s not real—it’s fictional—but the struggles that these people had you can relate to...In some way I think the experiences they go through are the common struggles of “Who can I trust?” “Is this real?” “Who’s my friend?” “Where can I find peace and solace in the world?” “What do I regret about things I’ve done in the past?” “Where am I going to go from here?”

Nearly every student agreed upon the reality of characters and their situations and how easy it was to relate to them.

Going beyond simply generalizing about how relatable and real the characters were, several individuals discussed specific characters with whom they personally identified. One person recalled a particularly interesting conversation that had happened only the night before she was interviewed. She was talking with a friend who at the time was going through the series, and the friend was relating how much he identified with character Jack Shephard:

We were talking last night and he was saying, “You know, I think I’m a lot like Jack, because I come from kind of a broken home where my father’s an alcoholic and I sort of have this internal need to fix everything.” And he was talking about his girlfriend: “Well she’s the one person who makes me be not like Jack and makes me be better than him.”

Another student recalled how she was surprised by the character with whom she identified the most:

I’m kind of a person of science—I’m mathematical and scientific, so there’s this whole struggle between Jack as the Man of Science and Locke as the Man of Faith. You’d think that I would associate more with Jack, but I just really like Locke on *Lost* and his faith. This might sound stupid, but I reconcile my faith and my science and Locke—I don’t want to say ‘spoke to me,’ but...yeah.

She had not mindlessly aligned with a certain character, but instead analyzed the reason for which she felt an affinity toward Locke instead of Jack, drawing on her own reconciliation of faith and science. Ali, a senior, remarked: “I kind of liked Kate at first because she’s very active and likes to get her hands dirty and do things, and I’m kind of like that.” One individual went into especial depth describing his similarities with Jack:

I’m kind of that type of very strong person with the same exact—I mean, I feel like him sometimes. I have this intense desire to fix everything and be in charge of everything, save everyone, do all this stuff, and it can be very frustrating and cause a lot of stress. It can make me a pain in the a\*\*, sometimes, I’m sure. But on the other hand, I think I do some good things, too, just like he did.

He went on to explain that he was highly aware of these similarities as he was watching the show and would comment to his roommate, “This is me,” while watching. Another participant recalled his own personal connection with the character Mr. Eko:

His struggles were so complicated. He had such guilt over his brother's death and using his brother. But he had a good heart. And he had these intentions of doing good, but he just couldn't do it. I don't know if that's my Catholic guilt that I grew up with—that you grow up with in a Catholic family...He was someone who was very different from everyone else. I didn't feel like he fit into the group very well. I think I always—sometimes relate to, not the outcast, but I enjoy someone who is on the outskirts.

Clearly these everyday fans' engagement with characters went beyond the simple levels of liking/disliking and abstract character analysis. They found the characters' struggles deeply relevant to their own lives.

Several saw their peers reflected in the characters. Some focused on the positive aspects of characters that reminded them of people they knew, like Ashley, a senior who commented:

I could see people I know in the characters, too. For instance, Sun and Jin—they didn't completely remind me of my parents, per se, but parts of [their storyline]. Their loving atmosphere.

Another student commented on the more negative aspects of characters she saw in people she knew:

I think Jack is one of those people that isn't comfortable with things being in the gray area. If he sees something, he has to categorize it to be comfortable—put it in either black or white. My dad and my brother are like that, and it's so annoying. I was getting after my brother for being judgmental and calling people “losers” and he was like, “What so I have to think everyone's a winner now?” and I'm like, “No, you don't have to think in a binary, you can just let them be people.” But that doesn't occur to him.

The fans saw not only themselves but also others reflected in the characters. Their engagement with characters went beyond analysis from a distanced, impersonal position

as they thought over the differences and similarities between real people and the characters of the show.

### III. Using Characters' Situations to Think, "What Would I Do?"

How particularly real characters and situations seemed in turn forced many to put themselves in situations seen in the show and wonder, "What would I do?" One person commented: "What am I going to do if, like Kate, I'm given a second chance?" Many scholars (Angelini and Booy 2010; Espenson 2010) have commented that shows with unrealistic or unusual settings can often have more realistic characters and storylines than those shows set in the "real world." In other words, a show like *Lost* on a fantastical island may say more about real life than a sit-com set in New York City. Several of the fans commented on this. One senior explained:

They make those choices, and what you would do in those situations is almost black and white. Like even in a less intense situation [than that shown], what you would do clears to you....How an extreme situation you would never be in (because it doesn't seem quite so similar to your life)—it makes it easier for you to identify with.

In other words, the extreme situations presented on the island helped her clarify what she would do in similar, but perhaps less extreme, situations in her own life. Another student expressed similar sentiments:

I think *Lost* tries to make you understand these issues and put you—you know, through character development they really make you identify with these characters and empathize with them so you can really think about these issues as if you were this person, or as if they were close friends going through this issue. So, it's kind of more real, almost. It's weird because there's time travel and this mysterious island, but there's also this aspect of reality.

Despite the rather outlandish situations *Lost* presents, many viewers felt not only able but compelled to imagine themselves in similar situations. This in turn forced them to confront the question of what they would do if they found themselves in such situations.

#### IV. Getting to the “Big” Issues through the Medium of the Characters

Beyond the practical and everyday issues raised through identification and analysis of characters, several individuals discussed the “big” issues of life—faith, purpose, identity, death, etc.—through talking about the characters. Using the language of the show—character names and events—students were able to discuss very intellectual themes without using philosophical jargon. Several students used the Man of Science/Man of Faith storyline between Jack Shephard and John Locke to discuss faith versus reason and rationality. John, a junior, analyzed how faith itself can take on a rational aspect:

It's peculiar because Locke's adherence to faith almost took on a rational side to it, where he would not even—his rationality became his faith in whatever he thought the mysteries of the island were. So he was sort of just as irresponsibly tied to faith as Jack was irresponsibly tied to his training in medical reason.

The same student used the character of Hurley to engage with issues of craziness and mental illness:

Hurley's funny because he's on neither end [of science and faith]. But he sort of throws up the binary and makes a third way where there's this conscious faith and this conscious reason and then there's just this crazy. And crazy's important. Crazy always throws up things in the air and makes things even more complicated. And so the place of mental illness and the effect, sort of, of isolation in society [are explored].

One senior, Amy, explained how watching with other people often led to conversation and debate about characters' actions. She describes how the importance of loyalty and duty could be debated through one scene where Jack reports his surgeon father for being drunk while operating in the emergency room:

I thought that was another really tough decision that was portrayed well on screen...You can take a side on things, like, "Oh, I don't think Jack should have ratted out his father," and the other person will be like, "No, he absolutely should have—here's why..." So it does get you thinking about tougher life decisions and—that's always good to get your brain rolling.

Fellow senior Ashley explained how, through exploring the characters' purpose in life, she also ended up thinking about her own:

*Lost* really meant understanding the characters and understanding why they were brought to the island, and kind of understanding why they were there goes along with understanding why *we* are *here*. So I guess—issues of purpose.

Another fan echoed this sentiment, describing how he would talk to his roommate about how the show relates to "life and meaning." The same fan also discussed how the ending had made him think about his own views of life after death:

I thought it was very appropriate that they met up in the end. I do personally like the idea that the people that are important to you and who shaped who you are—you can be with them at a later stage, in being.

Several of the everyday fans discussed the ideas of redemption and forgiveness playing out through *Lost*'s flawed characters:

It's like a combination of forgiveness and redemption and second chances. Just because, like I was saying, all these different people have issues and they come

together...Redeem yourself in others' eyes, redeem yourself in your own eyes. It's not just about forgiving each other, but forgiving yourself. And moving on. Getting over things. Like, Jack can't let go of his father. The Man in Black posed as him and [Jack] continues to participate, so he just can't let him go. Finally in the end, they all move on together, and get over their experiences as a whole because what was important wasn't what they went through on the island, it was what they went through together.

It's about forgiveness. Letting go—letting go of control. We don't have control over our lives. We do in some ways, but we really don't. Whether or not you want to say that's God or a higher power or just the way life works, it's about letting go. These characters really had to let go. John Locke does that from the beginning. Jack alludes to it when he talks about the fear [in the pilot episode]. He alludes to it but he doesn't do it. He's resisting.

One talked about how the theme of good versus evil played out not only in the major storyline but in the individual characters:

*Lost* is a lot about the connections between good and evil, sometimes versus each other, sometimes not. How does that exactly exist in one person? How does that exist in one place? How do you reconcile those two things? Because there's definitely this popular idea that you can't have one without the other. ...I think you can kind of say Sawyer and Jack are opposing forces at times....There was so much going on where you have one force opposing another and that just mirrors the overall.

The larger themes could be seen as being reflected in the characters themselves. Several of the interviewees focused on the idea of love as raised by the characters' stories:

It's about love and other people. It's kind of about spirituality and finding—connecting with other people as human beings no matter how different they are. And just how strong the bonds between people can be.

It's about life and love and loss. And overcoming adversities, like John Locke was in a wheelchair for so long but eventually got past it.



Love is what it's about, I think. You have these people who were all flawed, brought to the island for a reason...and then they end up...in some sort of purgatory. Seeing people who went through this experience together meeting up and waiting for each other to go on to the next part of their journey.

These everyday fans revealed having thought about everything from loyalty and craziness to purpose, the afterlife, and love—all using the characters as a jumping point. In order to speak about topics like faith versus reason, they did not need to know philosophers or terms—they simply used the characters and events of the show to explain their points. The show, in other words, provided them with a context and setting through which they could engage with profound ideas and deep issues.

Interestingly, the characters and the mystery provided a much better medium for intellectual activity than the numerous and blatant religious and philosophical references *Lost* includes. Those who identified as religious or spiritual tended to report enjoying the religious themes running throughout the series. Many spoke to how they particularly liked the fact that the message of *Lost* was not specific to any one religion, especially in the finale. One fan explained:

So maybe I think they're going through that door to heaven—who knows? I'm a Catholic, that's what I immediately go to. But if someone's Hindu or if someone's Muslim, [the end] has its own meaning to that person.

While many were happy with the breadth of religious interpretations allowed by the series and especially its ending, one complained about the option it excluded:

There's still a God thing going on. In a lot of ways there's no room for there not being a spirituality and there not being a religious sphere at the end...and I don't like that they took that away.

Beyond those themes that the students had engaged with through the characters, as described above, the remaining philosophical and religious referents were left largely untouched by discussion. In talking about the philosophical and religious aspects of the show, the participants noted large themes like “science versus faith,” “fate versus free will,” and “good versus evil themes,” but only in talking through the characters or the mystery. In other words, abstract theorizing did not occur for the most part unless through the medium of discussing the characters. Though aware of the remaining philosophical and religious referents, no one really investigated them:

I don't know enough philosophy to really get the references. I knew they were there, I just didn't know how they tied in....I guarantee 98% of people probably didn't get that.

I knew the Dharma Initiative had some Eastern religion things...but I didn't see so much if they were making a statement about it as just like—that it was there.

Yeah, you're like, “Oh wait—‘Locke?’ ‘Rousseau?’ Okay...I see what they're doing there.” But it wasn't that much.

I definitely recognized those names...but I didn't really...I don't really know those philosophers.

The everyday fans recognized the names of philosophers and the signs of references to certain religions, but left it at that. They did not engage in much exploration of these ideas or their connection to the show. In other words, the more formal philosophical and religious elements were left largely ignored while the more practical, everyday philosophical and religious themes, as presented through the characters and the mystery, were subject to a great deal of analysis. Big themes like good versus evil and science versus faith were not discussed using the language of academic philosophy—instead the fans engaged with these ideas by way of engaging with the characters.

## Accidental Intellectuals?

As evidenced by the quotes put forth above, everyday fans clearly engage in intellectual activity, ranging from critical thinking to the pondering of everyday philosophy issues. In other words, *Lost* made these everyday fans think. In answer to the research question posed at the beginning of this study, it seems that these fans were indeed forced to think about themes and everyday issues presented in the show simply by virtue of watching. The analyses these individuals described were, for most, not discussed with friends. A couple of those interviewed mentioned that conversations with friends or peers would reach profound levels, but most reported that conversations with others centered around the mysteries of the moment and what would happen next. The act of watching the show had prompted such analyses internally for most.

In answer to the question about which types of philosophy these fans engaged with, it seems that these everyday fans mainly engaged with everyday philosophy, as opposed to academic philosophy. Names and philosophical terms provided only an intriguing backdrop to the other aspects on which the fans focused. While the ideas these fans engaged with reached profound and deep levels, these ideas were accessed through the medium of the characters and not through direct abstraction. Though *Lost* is known for its characters named after philosophers and mysterious organizations with Eastern religious ties, these elements did not provide the impetus for intellectual activity on the part of the everyday fans.

As for answering whether or not this intellectual activity on the part of fans was conscious or unconscious, it helps to look at the progression that each interview followed.

Toward the beginning of the interview, each participant was asked about his/her conversations with other *Lost* viewers. Almost all reported that their conversations had not gone beyond re-hashing and discussing the mystery of the moment. They were then asked whether they *thought* about deeper issues and themes of the show, regardless of the fact they had not spoken to anyone about them. Those who reported that they had thought about such issues while watching the show were in the minority—with only about a fourth of the sample answering in the affirmative. Even of those who admitted to thinking about such things, only two indicated that they had thought about such things extensively. As the fans were asked about favorite and least favorite characters and plotlines, however, they revealed a depth and breadth of analysis that clearly indicated a great deal of forethought. In other words, it was clear that they were not coming up with these analyses and comments on the spot. They often pointed to specific scenes or dialogue from *Lost* in discussing larger ideas and themes, reflecting analyses that had been in development for some time and thoughts that had been accumulated throughout the course of watching the series. Even those who adamantly contended that they were only concerned with the mysteries and twists of the series eventually inadvertently revealed that they had unconsciously dealt with ideas and issues through engaging with the characters. In other words, though these everyday fans were not always aware that they were engaging in deep thought and profound analysis, they in fact were through the medium of the characters, and this became clear once they started discussing them. A few of the everyday fans were aware of the intellectual activity the show had inspired in them, but most had found themselves accidentally engaging with big ideas and profound issues.

Though all indicated that they identified as intellectuals when asked at the end of the interview, the vast majority wished to clarify that they only enjoyed thinking about practical, everyday issues—*not* academic philosophy. Interestingly, however, one fan pondered, “Maybe I just consider TV and my intellectual, philosophical side two different things,” almost immediately after having discussed profound issues of everyday philosophy through talking about the characters. The results of these interviews do not indicate that *Lost* is making intellectuals out of people who previously were not intellectual. They do indicate, however, that people who come to the show simply for the entertainment value of its plot twists and clues end up thinking about issues of everyday philosophy simply by going through the series. The majority of these fans did not enter into their experience of *Lost* with the goal of thinking in mind. All of those interviewed mentioned that they watched the show simply because they initially found it extremely entertaining. As they were entertained by *Lost*’s exciting antics, however, these everyday fans were forced to confront their own ideas about various everyday, practical philosophical issues that the show presented.

## Chapter 6

### **“Live Together, Die Alone”: An In-Depth Look at the Experiences of Four Cultists/Enthusiasts**

The four fans that composed the second sample fit perfectly into what Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) term the “cultist” and “enthusiast” segments of the audience continuum. The distinction between cultists and enthusiasts as outlined by Abercrombie and Longhurst is not nearly as clear as the distinction between these two groups and the everyday fans discussed in the previous chapter. For this reason, the fans in this sample are simply referred to as “cultists/enthusiasts.” All clearly demonstrated belonging at least to the cultist group, though each showed various characteristics of enthusiasts. Any distinction made with the amount of information available would have been arbitrary, and thus no distinction is made for present purposes. The important distinction is between this group and the everyday fans. While the everyday fans only discussed *Lost* within their day-to-day peer group, these four cultists/enthusiasts sought out the vast fan networks that exist on the Internet. This, for Abercrombie and Longhurst, was a clear distinction between “fans” (everyday fans) and “cultists.” Also following their distinction, these four individuals indicated media use that “revolves around certain defined and refined tastes” (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, p. 139)—in other words, their television program choices were deliberate and focused. The four also exhibited signs of belonging to the enthusiast segment, as many of them described how time-consuming *Lost* became, keeping them up until the wee hours of the morning watching or working with it: “given the amount of time devoted to the enthusiasm by its participants, there is likely to be little time left over to sleep” (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, p. 139). As further characterizes enthusiasts, all four fans engaged in fan activities outside

of watching the show itself, including writing about the show and attending *Lost* fan functions. Regardless of whether each of the four is more accurately described as a cultist or enthusiast, the distinction between the everyday fans and these fans is quite clear.

The interviews with these four individuals were much more open-ended than those with the everyday fans, focusing more on each person's individual story of fandom and how he or she reached such a the level of involvement. Pearson Moore, author of *LOST Identity* and *LOST Humanity* and editor of and contributor to recently published *LOST Thought*, only started watching the show after the second season had concluded. Hooked by the pilot episode, he went through the first two seasons in two days. It wasn't until the sixth season, however, that he started posting essays online for each episode. He recalls: "I was disappointed that most of the blogging activity consisted of recaps. Bloggers would simply regurgitate what they would see on the screen." Eager to provide *Lost* fans with more in-depth analysis, he posted at least one essay per episode for the final season and eventually went on to publish and edit books on the series that are incredibly popular and top in their category on sites such as Amazon.com. Jennifer Galicinski, currently a graduate student at Regent College in Vancouver, wrote a thesis paper about the post-modern aspects of *Lost* and recently contributed an essay to Moore's *LOST Thought*. Like Moore, she did not begin watching *Lost* when it aired in 2006 but instead caught up quickly after season 2 while she was teaching in Korea. Having participated in Moore's blog about the show and having read numerous other blogs, Galicinski became a "*Lost* guru" of sorts amongst her friends. She organized a series finale costume party with her friends, has been interviewed twice for television news programs about the fandom of the show, and attended *Lost* events like the Academic

Conference in New Orleans and the movie theater screening of an interview with Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse shortly before the finale aired. Jo Garfein is well known amongst fans for her popular blog “Get LOST with JOpinionated,” where she provided in-depth episode analysis and news of the show. Having started blogging in the second season, she quickly accumulated followers through word of mouth and eventually with the help of Facebook and Twitter. The respect and notoriety her blog gained eventually caught the eye of the networks and she now works as a freelance entertainment writer covering television for a variety of sites. She has also participated in numerous charity functions connected to the show and is currently planning an event to raise money for a charity called “Cancer Gets Lost.” Chris J. Doran works as Director of Marketing for a consumer electronics company. He was a regular reader of and contributor to Nikki Stafford’s blog “Nik at Nite,” and eventually developed several friendships through his online fan involvement. He frequented other blogs as well, including Erika Olsen’s “Long Live Locke,” Garfein’s site, and J. Wood’s blog for Powell’s Bookstore. Intending but unable to attend Comic-Con while the show was on, Doran later joined Moore, Galicinski, Garfein, and myself at the *Lost* Academic Conference in New Orleans in October of 2011.

All four individuals commented on how much of a time commitment *Lost* was for them. Both Moore and Galicinski reported having engaged in the binge-watching sessions to catch up with the current airing of the show many of the everyday fans had described. As mentioned above, Moore completed the first two seasons in only two days, waking up at about 4:30 in the morning to start each day. Galicinski, in Korea teaching English as a second language at the time, would start watching at around 11 PM at night



and stay up until 5 or so in the morning as she sped through the first two seasons. Beyond just watching the show for the first time, however, these cultists/enthusiasts put a great deal of time and effort into their experience with the show. Moore and Garfein described the intense hours involved in writing online during the season. In order to get their material out as soon as possible, both would stay up late into the night or early morning after an episode aired. Moore recounts, “I was up until at least 2 or 3 and often 5 or 6 in the morning the next day writing my essay, and then going to work...at 8 o’clock.” Garfein echoed this, recalling many nights that ended only at 4 or 5 in the morning. She mentioned: “I had friends in New York e-mailing me at 6 AM EST the morning after a new episode, asking why I hadn’t published. They would be on the treadmill or eating breakfast, clicking ‘refresh.’” Garfein even went beyond writing her usual blog to also begin a blog from Jeremy Bentham’s point of view between seasons four and five. The really busy time, however, was during the seasons: “During the season of the show, my life was consumed by *Lost*—but in a manageable, fun way. Every free moment I had, I was approving comments or responding to e-mails, talking about it in person with friends and co-workers, reading articles about it.” Both Moore and Garfein’s involvement clearly did not stop at blogging or writing essays, as Moore wrote several books about the series and Garfein continues to participate and help plan charity functions. Galicinski and Doran noted the week-to-week time commitment the show required of them. Galicinski, who has what she jokingly calls a “*Lost* shrine” in her room consisting of the *Lost* Encyclopedia, the DVDs, books, and various artifacts, used many of the fan resources at her disposal. She recalls how she would watch an episode, go to Youtube.com to view recap videos that highlighted the Easter Eggs, and then browse various blogs and sites

and just “read and read and read.” Re-watches, of course, also figured into the time spent with the show for these individuals. Galicinski, who watched the series three times through, recalled when talking about the characters: “Over 360 hours I had spent with these people!” Clearly, through watching, re-watching, writing, reading, and still other fan activities, these cultists/enthusiasts devoted a great deal of time and effort to *Lost*.

Beyond time commitment, another factor that distinguished these four individuals from the everyday fans was their being a part of the larger *Lost* fan community, often facilitated by the Internet. Moore and Garfein garnered not only followers and fans but also friends through writing online. Moore explained, “I received hundreds of comments on my essays and I would generally respond. I responded to something like 80 or 90 percent of the comments that I received.” He continued, saying, “Certainly some of those people who were following my writing have become friends. Certainly Nikki Stafford and a few other people who are somewhat well known. I have become friends certainly with other people who aren’t well known at all.” The online fan network opened up an opportunity to form friendships that superseded normal distance barriers. As quoted above, Garfein spent any free moment responding to comments and e-mails from followers. With the advent of Facebook and Twitter, she notes, “a vast network of fans” was opened up to her. Galicinski and Doran made connections and formed friendships not through hosting commentary themselves but through participating in other’s sites, like those of Moore and Stafford, respectively. Galicinski recalls:

Pearson [Moore] was a huge part of my *Lost* experience...He had so many super profound insights that I would jump out of my chair and dance around the room, being like, “This is so amazing! This is so good!” So we started e-mailing back and forth and he helped me a little

bit with my thesis—he helped edit it. So it was really fun to meet him at the *Lost* Conference because we’d been talking for a while.

Doran describes his experience with Stafford’s blog with equal enthusiasm:

Nikki [Stafford]’s blog in particular was a blast to read and participate in. The community of individuals who were reading and commenting regularly were a big part of my complete investment in the show from that point forward. She would do a weekly post, then people (self included) would chime in with their own thoughts, theories, comments, etc. It became a little bit of a competition, in a fun way, to try and point out things that others hadn’t noticed.

Through these comments and eventually through e-mail correspondence, Doran and Stafford became friends and met up a couple times when business or travel plans converged. Their friendship reached such a point that when Doran, devastated by the finale, did not appear on her blog for a bit, Stafford contacted him to make sure he was doing alright. The ties these four people made through the fan activity on the Internet ranged from distanced, writer/follower relationships to developed, close friendships. Doran noted that after the show was over he, “continued to follow Nikki’s blog and keep up with one or two fellow regulars,” but time and life constraints have made it difficult to keep in touch as much as they intended. Still, Garfein notes, many of the ties *Lost* viewers made online will last for years to come: “I have friends I met on Facebook or at a *Lost* event that I know will be in my life forever.” These four cultists/enthusiasts’ experience of *Lost* entailed rather extensive networking and community building.

Like the everyday fans, these individuals engaged in character and show analysis. Moore calls *Lost* “serial drama to the n<sup>th</sup> degree,” and saw it more as “one long episode that was going to be given in a dozen or a few dozen or a hundred or so parts.” He also

makes a point of highlighting *Lost* viewers as *participant observers*. He explains, “right away the question that’s posed to us is, ‘What are we going to do with the knowledge of the island? What is our response going to be?’” and by the second season he was asking himself, “How can I say that I’m an observer? I’m a participant in this process. I’m having to spend a huge amount of time trying to figure out what’s going on.... It’s nonlinear storytelling.” He contrasts *Lost* with other popular procedural shows like *Law & Order*:

A lot of TV shows you can turn off the picture and you can just listen to the dialogue and listen to what’s happening and it’s like you’re experiencing a radio show, because you don’t need to see anything. *Law & Order* episodes are really good for that. You can just turn off the picture and listen to what they’re saying. They’re going to tell you everything that’s going on...Even to the point that anything they see, they’re going to talk about! It’s expository storytelling.

*Lost* required viewers to focus attention at the screen, making it very difficult to do anything else while watching the show and still catch every clue that needed to be caught. In addition to drawing a distinction between *Lost* and other television shows, a couple of these individuals discussed characters in the same way the everyday fans had. Garfein talked about the assortment of female characters on the show, saying:

I did not truly like any female character until Juliet arrived in season 3. She was very strong yet emotional underneath, mysterious, and smart. I had no idea which side she was on, and loved that she played her cards so close to the vest. Unlike Kate.

All four cultists/enthusiasts noted the importance and depth of the characters. Galicinski, in explaining her thesis, discussed postmodern aspects of *Lost*. Drawing from the diversity and depth of characters, she argued:

It's very disorienting, there's lost of mini stories patched together. People were kind of a pastiche—this kind of patchwork of different ideas that don't normally dwell together, they mesh them all together. One of the hallmarks of post-modernity that I learned about is that it can be a very disorienting feeling. Modernity is more about black-and-white; we know what truth is. Then in post-modernity it's more of a choose-your-own-adventure kind of thing; choose you own truth. There's no more meta-narrative.

Her thesis originally grew out of making the connection between what she was learning in one of her classes about post-modernity and what she was viewing while she watched *Lost*. Doran commented on the “heady mix of pop culture and academia, which really are often conflicting worlds. Pop culture fans are intimidated by academia or dismissed by it. Academics usually frown on popular culture or consider it weak tea, at best.” As pop culture and academia merged in the show, Doran explains, he felt urged to embark on a sort of intellectual journey:

I do feel that *Lost* inspired a particular kind of intellectual travel, one that I've gone on more than once in my life, and hope to continue as long as I live...Day-to-day life tends to constrict your intellectual journey to what facts/ideas are necessary, rather than ones that are intriguing for no other reason than that they engage you on some level....*Lost* reminded me that the world of ideas, speculation and rumination was important to me, and essential to a feeling of fulfillment in my life.

*Lost* provided fans like Doran with not simply an intellectual escape from real life, but a reminder that intellectual realm can be part of real life. As the day-to-day milieu of life keeps people distracted with minutiae and details of busy schedules, *Lost* actually provides an avenue for learning and thinking about big ideas, and serves as a reminder to try and incorporate such things into daily life.

The actual intellectual activity that *Lost* inspired in not only these four cultists/enthusiasts but also in the everyday fans of *Lost* takes many forms. The cultists/enthusiasts particularly investigated and analyzed the philosophical and religious references and literary allusions and also drew parallels between *Lost* and other books, shows, and films. Moore drew parallels between *Lost* and *The Seventh Samurai*. He explains:

The idea there was that the samurai didn't reach a state of perfection until there were seven of them. So basically I was saying that the six candidates and the Oceanic Six constituted something less than perfection and that in the sixth season we would see a movement towards achievement of that perfection. The idea was that a seventh candidate would appear. My interpretation early on was that the seventh candidate was likely to be Kate Austin. That certainly seems to have been confirmed.

Beyond this comparison, he further noted the *Alice in Wonderland* and Stephen King parallels. Garfein has focused specifically on juxtaposing *Alice in Wonderland* and *Lost* not only in her paper at the *Lost* Conference but also in her contribution to Moore's *LOST Thought*. Galicinski mentioned the references to both Jane Austen and *Watership Down* in the show and how she loved, "learning the literary stuff...researching the philosophy...[and] even learning about things like quantum mechanics." Moore discussed the parallels between the tablets of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament and the covenant stone in the final episode of *Lost*. These individuals researched and investigated not only the references made in the show to certain books but also literary and philosophical parallels they themselves developed. Whereas the everyday fans had barely engaged with the various references made to books or

philosophers, such Easter eggs were the fodder for great investigation and analysis for these cultists/enthusiasts.

For many fans who devoted such time and energy to the show, the experience of *Lost* was deeply personal. Galicinski and Doran described the incredibly emotional reactions they had to the series ending. Galicinski first focused on how much of an impact *Lost* had on her life:

When I was in Korea, I felt very lost in my own life. I was very homesick and I felt very isolated. I didn't have a lot of close friends. Just being in a culture that is not your own for so long can be very draining. *Lost* just kind of gave me back this—as cheesy as it sounds—it gave me back this passion for learning...so I started reading more and I started loving to discuss these ideas and realizing how awe-inspiring life is, really. As cheesy as it sounds! *Lost* saved me, in a way.

She then went on to describe how devastating the end of the series was for her, leaving her in a sort of period of “mourning,” understandably so after devoting several years and numerous hours to watching, re-watching, and analyzing the show and its characters. Doran described his initial disappointment in the finale as causing, “not so strangely...a *personal* reaction that I felt the need to work through on my own.” Just as many of the everyday fans commented on how they cared about the characters and missed them after the series ended, similar sentiments surfaced with these individuals. Interestingly, however, these individuals also had to deal with the end (or severe tapering) of the activity online that had been such a huge part of their *Lost* experience. Their daily and weekly routines changed significantly after the series concluded.

Talking about the conclusion of the series, of course, begs the question: what now? Looking forward, what will the legacy of *Lost* be? One of the everyday fans

commented that with all other television shows, “you can analyze but at some point you just hit the ceiling on what you can talk about. With *Lost*, there wasn’t a ceiling. At least no one’s found it yet.” The activity of the cultists/enthusiasts of the show demonstrates this. Moore explains:

The work goes on. Trying to make sense of the very rich subtext mythology of the show and the characters and the way all of these things interacted to tell us new things about the human condition. We’ve really just started to uncover these things.

Garfein argues for *Lost* having a legacy not only amongst fans but also amongst the general populace:

I believe that *Lost* will be looked upon as ground breaking and inspiring, not just to other shows but in terms of fan participation and interest, show runner presence and overall influence. It will be studied in classes, from the impact it had on education (promoting literature, mythology, history, philosophy, physics, and more) to the thematic significance of redemption, family relationships, free will, etc.

Indeed some scholars have already made the move to try and integrate *Lost* into teaching concepts like leadership (Sudbrack and Trombley 2007). As time goes on, the *Lost* fan base only increases. The show’s availability on Netflix and in DVD form has led to countless new viewers joining the fan ranks. Garfein noted that as time has passed, her “Facebook and Twitter followers have actually increased, which is baffling but I attribute it to the continuing interest in the show from both existing and new fans.” Several of the everyday fans interviewed for this study had started watching the program after the finale aired. As Doran explains, however, for any fan of the show, old or new, reflecting on the experience of the show is important:



In *Lost*, as in life you can see as you look back how doors opened and people walked into your life. Or, conversely, how you walked through these doorways (sometimes without realizing it) and had experiences that helped define your actions, your character, and your destiny. It is very valuable to try and understand these experiences, not only in the moment but afterward. They may prove rewarding in many different ways upon reflection. In other words, once in awhile, we ought to “GO BACK!”

Almost all individuals interviewed, both everyday fans and cultists/enthusiasts, said that they intended to re-watch the show in the future, whenever that may be. *Lost* is not done with its fans, and its fans are clearly not done with it, either.

## Chapter 7

### **“It Only Ends Once. Everything Before That is Just Progress”: Conclusion**

As cult, quality, and mainstream television merged, it bred a new type of television show. *Lost* drew the audience numbers of a mainstream hit and the fervent fans of a cult classic. Looking at the range of viewers who identify as fans, this study provides an examination of a spectrum of experiences. In 1998 Abercrombie and Longhurst inadvertently exposed a deficiency in the literature when they renamed those traditionally termed “fans” as instead “cultists” and “enthusiasts.” Those that they termed “fans” have been previously overlooked in studies of fandom. These everyday fans, as I call them, still identify as fans but do not engage in many of the activities traditionally associated with fandom. They pour time and effort into the experience of the show, but for them, it remains a pleasant diversion, not a life-consuming devotion.

The cultists/enthusiasts of *Lost* fall perfectly in line with previous cult fans such as those of *Star Trek* and *Buffy*. These individuals write about the show, seek to network with other fans, and incorporate the show into their daily routines, devoting time to research and discussion. Before Abercrombie and Longhurst, the audience was thought to consist of two main groups: these highly devoted fans and simple, casual viewers. Using Abercrombie and Longhurst’s innovative audience continuum, this study identifies a group of fans that fall between the extremes: the everyday fans. This study investigated the experience of both everyday fans and cultists/enthusiasts of the show *Lost*.

*Lost* makes viewers think in a variety of ways. Its puzzles and mysteries require critical thinking to make sense of the narrative. Its characters prompt not only character

analysis but also personal identification. Further, the characters provide a medium through which fans can conduct not only character analysis but also engage with both practical and profound issues of everyday philosophy. As Kaye (2011) argues: “*Lost* forces us to confront profound questions about ourselves and the world. Why am I here? Does life matter? Do I have a special purpose? Can I make a difference?” The show itself gives these fans a language with which they can discuss issues that previously required philosophical jargon and familiarity with historical thinkers. Individuals no longer need technical terms and references to discuss highly intellectual issues. To talk about science and faith, fans need only discuss the dynamic between Jack Shephard and John Locke. To talk about fate versus free will, fans need only discuss Jacob and his candidates. The show provides them with a new language that they can use to engage with very deep and profound issues.

The people at the level of the cultists/enthusiasts are aware that the show makes them think—it is that aspect of the show that they not only enjoy but embrace. They also enjoy tracing the philosophical, literary, and religious references to their roots. A few of the everyday fans were aware of the show causing them to think deeply, but most were not. Most everyday fans had found themselves unintentionally dealing with practical and profound issues as a result of following the characters’ progress. They only revealed having thought about such things as they were discussing favorite characters and storylines. The show is, in a way, making audience members into *accidental intellectuals* throughout their experience of the show.

This thesis does not argue that the show fundamentally changes the intellectual nature of individuals who watch. Regardless of whether or not (and in what way) these

fans consider themselves intellectuals outside of the realm of watching the show, viewing *Lost* had the same effect on all of them. They were forced to engage with deep and practical questions consciously and often unconsciously. Even those individuals who had claimed that their thoughts about the show went no further than critical thinking inadvertently revealed that they had gone through a great deal of analysis while watching simply by engaging with the characters and their stories. Just as the students in the study of Schiappa et al (2004) were forced to think about death as a result of watching several episodes of *Six Feet Under*, so these fans were forced to think about issues of science versus faith, good versus evil, and fate versus free will by viewing *Lost*. Some mentioned having to think about life after death, the purpose of life, the existence of redemption, the nature of truth, and the role of love in life. Still others discussed forgiveness, letting go, and duty to others.

While most of the everyday fans reported that such deep analysis had no place in their discussions with other fans, conversations about *Lost* still provided a welcome break from the often inane topics of day-to-day conversation. One everyday fan mentioned how *Lost* provided a welcome alternative to normal high school topics:

It wasn't boring, normal conversation. High school conversation consists of why you like or dislike people. "Oh, I think she's hot." It was something different to talk about. It wasn't always necessarily very intellectual, but it did plant things to think about.

While the everyday fans left the deep analysis out of conversations, for the most part, the cultists/enthusiasts sought to center their conversations on such discussion. These more dedicated fans also investigated the philosophical, religious, and literary references whereas most everyday fans had not.

Interestingly, even though the everyday fans interviewed belonged to a younger generation, most did not carry their experience of *Lost* to the Internet for blogging or discussion with other fans. Most had not even looked up simple information details about the show more than once. Seeing as how younger generations are stereotyped as the most active on the Internet, this was surprising. One possible reason for this is that these younger individuals had a sort of *Lost* fan network at the ready for them in both high school and college, while the older cultists/enthusiasts did not. One of the cultists/enthusiasts, Chris J. Doran, explains that, “As more ‘adults’ find their lives filled up with social obligations, there are fewer people that surround you with whom you have an intellectual relationship.” A college campus provides an ideal environment for finding other individuals who want to discuss things like a television show. For those older fans removed from the community environment that high school and college campuses provide, the Internet provides a space to share one’s own ideas and hear those of others.

While this study was in line with recent fan research that primarily characterizes certain segments of the television audience as active rather than passive, this study went one step further to explore a segment of the audience previously ignored—the everyday fans—that also exhibits an active engagement with television programs. Jenkins’ (1992) work helped to establish that at least the fan portion of audiences could not be characterized by passivity. To Jenkins’ “fans” (Abercrombie and Longhurst’s cultists/enthusiasts) this study adds everyday fans as another segment of the audience that cannot be dismissed as primarily passive. These everyday fans showed an intellectual curiosity and fervent analytical skills as they reminisced about their experiences with the show.

The demographics of both the everyday fan and cultist/enthusiast samples are clearly limited. By interviewing college students and fans that traveled to an academic conference about the show, the samples are taken from environments that tend to draw intellectual people. As mentioned above, however, this study does not claim to permanently change whether or not people are intellectuals. Instead it merely argues that while watching these shows, the fans accidentally end up engaging in intellectual activity and thinking about everyday philosophy. It seeks to comment on *Lost*'s effect on their lives no further than the bounds of their direct experience with the show. For a pastime stigmatized as mindless, however, the findings of this study have important implications for the value of watching certain television shows. While viewers are being entertained, they are also thinking critically and pondering practical life issues about how to act and how to live.

Further research is needed to truly gain an understanding of the everyday fan segment of the television audience. It is possible that the experience of everyday fans explored here is unique to *Lost*, though only research on the audiences of other modern shows will help determine this. Further research must also focus on populations outside of specifically academic settings, investigating those who do not go to college or do not have academic degrees. In other words, more research needs to investigate the audience continuum across other shows as well as across other environments. This study provides some of the first steps to investigating the new landscape of the modern audience through the use of interviews. As television has evolved, so have its viewers. As television becomes more complicated, many of its audience members have risen to the challenge. As these fans of *Lost* puzzled over the smoke monster and the hatch and became attached

to Sawyer's witty remarks and Jack's desperate determination, they exercised their critical and analytical thinking skills and reflected back on their own lives. If only all philosophizing could be that wildly entertaining.

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## Appendix A: Guide for Interviews with Everyday Fans

NOTE: I CREATED THESE QUESTIONS AS A GUIDE FOR THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS. GOING INTO THE INTERVIEWS, I WAS OPEN TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT I WOULD NOT GET TO ALL QUESTIONS AND THE INTERVIEWEE MIGHT STEER THE CONVERSATION IN UNEXPECTED DIRECTIONS. THESE QUESTIONS SERVED AS A MAIN FRAMEWORK FOR TOPICS I WISHED TO INVESTIGATE.

[Start with the Youtube.com video “Thank You L O S T Season 1-6.”]

### Television experience

- How often do you watch television? What shows have you seen? Which shows are your favorites? Has television always been a part of your life? Do you often talk about television with others? Do you consider yourself a fan of certain shows? Of *Lost*? How much of a fan, 1-10?

### Basic involvement with *Lost*

- How did you get involved with *Lost*? Did you watch it while it was on TV? Did you watch it online? How many times have you watched it? Do you plan on watching it any more in the future?

### *Lost* and other people

- Do you have many friends who watched *Lost*? Did you watch *Lost* alone or with other people? Did you talk about *Lost* often with other people? What were these conversations about? What types of things did you tend to discuss?
- Did you ever go online to investigate something about the show? Have you ever read blogs or participated in chat rooms?
- How did your non-*Lost* fan friends react to your own interest in the show?

### Impressions of the show

- Why did you watch the show? Did you think about the show often?
- What were your favorite parts? Favorite characters? Why?
- Did you like how the show progressed? The finale? What didn't you like about *Lost*? What about the religious and philosophical references?
- What do you think *Lost* is ultimately about?

### Intellectual; Types of Philosophy

- Do you like talking/reading about philosophy? Do you like talking/reading about everyday philosophy? Do you consider yourself an intellectual person?

## Appendix B: Table with Main Character Descriptions

CHARACTER	DESCRIPTION	BEFORE THE ISLAND	AFTER CRASHING	ACTOR/ ACTRESS
<b>JACK SHEPHARD</b>	Doctor born-leader with a compulsive need to fix things	Followed in father's footsteps to become a spinal surgeon; divorced	Leader of the group; love triangle with Kate and Sawyer; "Man of Science"	Matthew Fox
<b>JOHN LOCKE</b>	Former paraplegic turned hunter who loves the Island	Held low-level job at a box company; conned and paralyzed by own father	Hunter extraordinaire; magically healed by the island; "Man of Faith"	Terry O'Quinn
<b>KATE AUSTIN</b>	Beautiful fugitive constantly on the run	Wanted for murder; constantly running from the authorities	Tougher-than-she-looks; love triangle with Jack and Sawyer	Evangeline Lilly
<b>JAMES "SAWYER" FORD</b>	Southern conman bad boy with a sharp wit	His family ruined by a conman, he became one himself	Rude, selfish, unwilling to help; condescends to other survivors by calling them mean nicknames	Josh Holloway
<b>SAYID JARRAH</b>	Former Iraqi torturer with keen survival skills	Tortured prisoners for the Iraqi Republican Guard	Works to secure rescue from the island; remains relatively aloof	Naveen Andrews
<b>SUN AND JIN KWON</b>	Estranged Korean couple attempting to patch up their marriage	Madly in love but fallen out since Jin had to work for Sun's shrewd father	Work through marital problems and deception and begin to reconcile	Yunjin Kim and Daniel Dae Kim
<b>HUGO "HURLEY" REYES</b>	Lottery winner with terrible luck but a sense of humor	Won the lottery but subsequently had absolutely terrible luck	Comic relief with an odd ability to see dead people	Jorge Garcia
<b>MICHAEL DAWSON</b>	Father who recently got custody with the mother died	Loses child in custody dispute; construction worker with artistic aspirations	Father trying to get closer to son who doesn't even know him; will do anything to get son home	Harold Perrineau
<b>CLAIRE LITTLETON</b>	8-months pregnant single girl	Got pregnant with a boyfriend who then left her; giving baby up for adoption	Worries about birth of her baby; befriends Charlie	Emilie de Ravin
<b>CHARLIE PACE</b>	Heroin addict member of the one-hit-wonder rock band Driveshaft	Famous for the song "You All Everybody"; fell into drug addiction when his band fell apart	Works to kick his drug habit and be a reliable friend to Claire and father figure to her baby	Dominic Monaghan
<b>SHANNON RUTHERFORD</b>	20-year-old spoiled socialite	Taught ballet; left out of her inheritance when her father died	Whines about everything; develops a relationship with Sayid	Maggie Grace
<b>BOONE CARLYLE</b>	Kind hearted step-brother of Shannon	Worked for rich mother's wedding company	Becomes Locke's sidekick; works to distance himself from Shannon	Ian Somerhalder
<b>DANIELLE ROUSSEAU</b>	French woman stranded on the island for 16 yrs	Worked with a team of scientists; marooned on the island in a storm	Killed her team, feared to be "infected"; searches for her child, Alex	Mira Furlan
<b>BENJAMIN LINUS</b>	Ruthless and mysterious leader of the Others	Born off the island but moved there with his father when young	Proves treacherous and conniving to everyone he comes in contact with	Michael Emerson
<b>DESMOND HUME</b>	Hopeless romantic trying to get back to his love, Penny	Attempted to sail around the world to gain the respect of Penny's father	Does everything possible to get back to Penny	Henry Ian Cusick
<b>JULIET BURKE</b>	Poker-faced member of the Others	Fertility doctor who invested a way for cancer patients to get pregnant	Works for the Others but wants to leave the Island	Elizabeth Mitchell